

Eastbound at Windy Point, 1950 (R. W. Richardson)

COLORADO ANNUAL 1967

Farewell to Cumbres

Gordon Chappell

100

Shortly after 1 p.m. on Sunday, October 9, 1966, the engineer of Denver & Rio Grande Western narrow gauge locomotive 484 pulled twice on the whistle cord, notched the throttle back several inches, and a long string of yellow coaches full of passengers bid farewell to the 10,015-foot heights of Cumbres. Only a few aboard knew that they were riding the last passenger train to reach the Summits; a week before, the Kiwanis *Kolor Karavan* excursion had been the last passenger train to make the complete run from Alamosa to Durango and back, and Epsilon Sigma Alpha Sorority excursion to Cumbres was the last to run over the slim-gauge rails between Alamosa and Cumbres. Early in January this year the railroad admitted publicly that it had decided never (*Cont. over*)

COLORADO ANNUAL 1967

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EDITORS
Cornelius W. Hauck
Robert W. Richardson

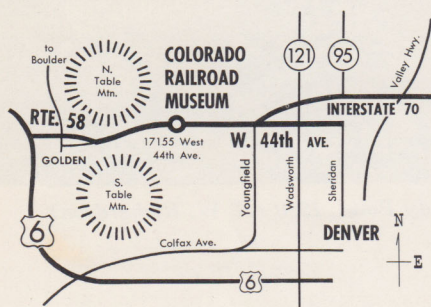
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Striking color prints of authentic early-day scenes on famed DSP&P narrow gauge in Colorado Rockies, by Ronfor and Ward. Each 9 x 12" on 12 1/2 x 19" sheet. Full set 8 for \$7.00 ppd. or 4 by either artist \$3.50. Limited edition; folder from—

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to run another. And so, after 85 years of mountain railroading, no more, it seemed, would little passenger trains climb to the heights of Cumbres.

Cumbres! To say *Cumbres Pass* is redundant, for Cumbres is Spanish, and translates as "summits." Los Cumbres: The Summits. But it is a word of many different meanings. To some of the old dragoons, soldiers who campaigned out west before the Civil War, *Cumbres* recalled the site of a savage battle with Jicarilla Apaches fought on its western slope. To an old, retired section hand living at Juanita, it meant years spent spiking down rails and maintaining a section of track which carried the busy trains of the Denver & Rio Grande. To a hardy engineer such as Bill Holt, it recalled bitter winter cold and the deep drifts of snow and danger of avalanches, of little engines battling their way over the "hill." Cumbres recalls days of diamond stacks and diamond stick-pins, and the beauty of a summer thundershower mingling with coal smoke over the heights of the Conejos Range.

The story of rails over Cumbres began on October 24, 1879, when Construction Engineer Robert F. Weitbrec huddled with Denver & Rio Grande Chief Engineer J. A. McMurtrie in the latter's South Pueblo office, and drew up a "Plan of Campaign" for the San Juan Extension — also sometimes called the Silverton Extension — in a little notebook bound in red leather. That year the railroad stretched all the way from Denver to Alamosa, and had already been graded from the end of track at Alamosa southward down the San Luis Park to the Conejos River.

Early in November, Weitbrec ran advertisements for bids in local newspapers: "Proposals will be received at the office of the undersigned until noon Nov. 20th, 1879, for the grading of the San Juan Extension of the Denver & Rio Grande Railway..." One day after the closing date, the San Juan Extension Company, which was in charge of construction for the railroad, signed contracts for grading and bridging from the Conejos westward to the Rio de las Animas Perdidas, and the various subcontractors soon had their men at work in the wild hills west of the San

Luis Park (later to be called the San Luis Valley).

On February 20, 1880, construction crews commenced laying track south from the railhead at Alamosa on the roadbed which had been built to the Conejos in 1879. From the railroad's new town of Antonito, a short distance south of the Conejos, the company planned simultaneously to build two lines: one southward toward El Paso, the other westward toward Silverton.

Labor was extremely scarce that winter, and the company had to search far and wide. In April, 125 men were shipped from Hays City, Kansas, and others came from St. Louis and even Chicago. That same month the company advertised in Montreal newspapers for tie cutters:

De BONS BUCHERONS
disposes a aller au Colorado
gagner de \$3 a \$5 par jour, en
coupant des ties en bois de pin
blanc . . . peuvent obtenir un
engagement signe par la "*Denver and Rio Grande Railway Company*" . . .

"Good wood cutters disposed to go to Colorado to earn from \$3 to \$5 a day cutting white pine ties . . . can obtain a contract signed by the Denver and Rio Grande . . ." Despite labor shortages that required recruiting as far away as Canada, the line was steadily if slowly driven westward, through winter snows and spring rains which turned the Conejos Range into mounds of mud.

The extension company, once rails were being laid, used a "boarding train" of about eight sleeping cars, three dining cars, one cook car, one commissary car, and one store room car. By stretching a point, one might consider this the first "passenger" train on the rails to cross Cumbres.

The line over Cumbres lay in extremely rough country, and construction took more than a year just to reach the Chama River. While most narrow gauge railroads in the Rockies followed streams and their canyons, this particular extension cut across from one watershed to another. From the Conejos it cut across to the Rio de Los Pinos, which it followed awhile, and then over to the watershed of the Rio Chamita, or Little Chama River, by way of Cumbres — which Weitbrec initially referred to as the "Pinos-Chama Summit."



Famous William H. Jackson view taken during the eighties typifies early day operation over the Cumbres Pass line. The location is Big Horn, 19 miles west of Antonito, in the foothills. Here the track passes up the near side of the valley (foreground), loops around to the left and climbs the opposite side where the train is standing. After making another loop behind the hill, the track can be seen behind the train, still higher, on a third level. The train would appear to be a regular passenger during the period when Pullmans were not run beyond Alamosa; baggage-mail, coach and chair car are drawn by one of the three small 1883 eightwheelers of Class 42½. (State Historical Society of Colo.)

Original depot at Alamosa was this sturdy stone affair, later superseded by a large wooden station that was consumed in a spectacular fire. Third and final structure was a substantial brick building sufficient for the remaining needs of the narrow gauge. (State Historical Society of Colo.)



The eastern approach to Cumbres was on a gentle 1.42 per cent grade, but to the west the approach from the Chama River comprised fourteen miles of 4 per cent. Here, in the vicinity of Cumbres, were the two largest bridges on the line, each crossing an insignificant stream: Cascade Creek, eleven miles east of Cumbres, and Wolf Creek (Lobato, in Spanish), nine miles to the west. These deep ravines were temporarily bridged by spindly wooden trestles which were replaced with iron bridges within a year.

The railhead reached the Little Chama River on New Year's Eve, 1880. Here the railroad began a five-stall brick roundhouse, a frame station, and other permanent facilities, for Chama was to become a substantial lumber town, a railroad division point, and the base for helper locomotives needed for the steep grade eastward up to the pass. Track crews meanwhile worked to upgrade the newly completed track from Antonito and prepare it for operations.

On February 1, 1880, a month after the first wobbly rails had reached Chama, the track to that point was transferred from the Extension Company to the railroad, which began running passenger and freight trains over the new line. From Chama, passengers could take J. L. Sanderson & Company stage coaches on to Animas City, Parrott City, Silverton, Rico, and other mining camps in the San Juan Country. Heavy freight wagons, their teams struggling through the axle-deep mud, carried on a brisk commerce between the railhead and the mines.

The El Paso Extension had also been progressing south from the Conejos River towards Santa Fe, though it was destined to be halted temporarily at Espanola by agreement with the AT&SF Railway, and never to extend any further south than Santa Fe. From Chamita on that line, where the Rio Chama emptied into the Rio Grande, the construction engineers began laying out and grading another line to Chama, thus to form a triangle from Antonito to Chama to Chamita. But after forty miles of grading was completed, the project was dropped without a rail ever having been laid.

Construction continued westward from Chama. In May the head of

track had reached Amargo, 23 miles further west, and was quickly turned over to the railroad so it could get the business west of Chama that otherwise would benefit the Sanderson stages and the numerous wagon freighters.

Over on the Animas River, forty-four miles south of Silverton, the town of Animas City had sprung up in 1876 as a smelter and shipping town supplying the mining camps north and west. But true to its exploitive character, the Denver & Rio Grande had its own plans, and in September, 1880, surveyed a town-site a mile to the south of Animas City which it called Durango after the city of the same name in Mexico. Protest as they might, the citizens of Animas City could do nothing, and Durango took its place, ultimately to absorb completely the pioneer town on the River of Lost Souls. Durango was born in the form of coins jingling in the Rio Grande's pockets.

Telegraph construction was proceeding apace with the railhead, and as the rails reached Arboles, the new wires were flashing news that President James Garfield had been shot by an assassin. Despite optimistic early reports on his condition, the President died. In September, members of the National Association of General Passenger and Ticket Agents held a memorial service alongside the new tracks in Toltec Gorge just east of Cumbres, and subsequently erected a stone monument which still stands near the west portal of Toltec Tunnel.

In June, Arboles, 37 miles west of Amargo, became the new operating terminus where passengers transferred from the little narrow gauge coaches to the stages. The schedule of the passenger train to this point, according to a timetable published on June 12, 1881, called for departure from Denver at 8 a.m. and arrival in Alamosa at 10:25 that night, after more than fourteen hours in the rocking little coaches. The train continued right on through the night, the little narrow gauge Pullman Palace sleepers swaying through the dark, past La Jara at 11 p.m., Antonito at 11:47, Big Horn at 4:55, Los Pinos at 7 a.m., Cumbres a full day after departure from Denver, and Chama an hour after that. The train reached Amargo, where passengers inter-

DENVER AND SILVERTON LINE.

No. 3	Ml.	August 10, 1894.	Ml.	No. 2
		LEAVE	ARRIVE	
*730 P.M.	0	Denver	547	10 30 A.M.
738 "	2	Burnham	545	
741 "	4	S. F. & G. Crossing	543	10 10 "
754 "	10	Littleton	537	10 07 "
759 "	14	Wolhurst	533	
	17	Acequia	530	
	21	Toluca	526	
821 "	25	Sedalia	522	9 46 "
840 "	33	Castle Rock	514	9 35 "
	35	Douglas	512	
	43	Larkspur	504	9 16 "
	47	Greenland	500	
1930 "	52	Palmer Lake	495	18 50 "
947 "	56	Monument	491	8 39 "
	62	Husted	485	
	67	Edgerton	480	
10 11 "	71	Pikeview	476	
10 25 "	75	Colorado Springs	472	7 56 "
	80	Kelker	467	7 41 "
	84	Widenfeld	463	
	88	Fountain	459	
	94	Buttes	453	
	99	Wigwam	448	
	106	Pinon	441	
11 13 "	112	Eden	435	
11 35 "	120	arr. Pueblo. δ lve.	427	6 30 "
11 45 P.M.	120	lve. Pueblo	arr.	16 10 "
	136	Swallows	411	
	143	Beaver	404	
12 55 N.H.T.	152	Florence	395	5 09 "
1 15 A.M.	161	Canon City	386	4 51 "
	171	Parkdale	376	
	186	Texas Creek	361	
2 22 "	193	Cotopaxi	354	3 47 "
	204	Howard	343	
	210	Wellsville	337	
3 03 "	215	Cleora	332	
3 10 "	217	arr. Salida. δ lve.	330	3 05 A.M.
*6 20 "	217	lve. Salida	arr.	10 15 P.M.
6 55 "	227	Mears Junction	320	9 40 "
7 13 "	231	Poncha Pass	316	9 20 "
7 25 "	235	Round Hill	312	9 05 "
8 00 "	247	Villa Grove	300	8 33 "
8 12 "	253	Hot Springs	294	8 20 "
8 27 "	259	Mirage	288	8 05 "
8 39 "	265	Moffat	282	7 52 "
8 52 "	271	La Garita	276	7 39 "
9 03 "	276	Dune	271	7 28 "
9 15 "	282	Garrison	265	7 16 "
9 28 "	289	Mosca	260	7 02 "
9 43 "	296	McGinty	248	6 47 "
10 55 "	302	arr. Alamosa. δ lve.	245	*6 35 "
11 15 "	302	lve. Alamosa	arr.	16 10 "
10 45 "	317	La Jara	230	5 44 "
11 00 "	324	Manassa	223	5 29 "
11 20 "	331	Antonito	216	5 15 "
11 46 A.M.	341	Lava	206	4 50 "
12 10 NO'N	350	Big Horn	197	4 25 "
12 33 "	355	Sublette	192	4 03 "
12 46 NO'N	361	Toltec	186	3 48 "
1 00 P.M.	366	Toltec Gorge	181	3 34 "
1 12 "	369	Osier	178	3 23 "
1 24 "	373	Los Pinos	174	3 11 "
1 53 "	381	Cumbres	166	2 45 "
2 17 "	386	Cresco	161	2 17 "
12 55 "	395	arr. Chama. δ lve.	152	1 35 "
3 20 "	395	lve. Chama	arr.	11 10 P.M.
3 35 "	400	Willow Creek	147	12 55 NO'N
3 48 "	404	Azotea	143	12 40 "
4 12 "	414	Monero	133	12 12 "
4 25 "	417	Amargo	130	12 01 NO'N
4 52 "	428	Navajo	119	11 28 A.M.
5 15 "	437	Juanita	110	11 01 "
5 40 "	446	Carracas	101	10 36 "
6 03 "	454	Arboles	93	10 13 "
6 47 "	459	La Boca	78	9 31 "
7 07 "	476	Ignacio	71	9 12 "
7 38 "	488	Florida	59	8 39 "
8 04 "	496	Bocea	51	8 15 "
8 20 P.M.	502	arr. Durango. δ lve.	45	*8 00 A.M.
No. 486				No. 486
*7 30 A.M.	502	lve. Durango	arr.	45 5 45 P.M.
7 58 "	509	Home Ranch	38	5 17 "
8 12 "	511	Trimble	36	5 03 "
8 30 "	513	Hermosa	34	4 55 "
9 00 "	520	Rockwood	27	3 55 "
9 15 "	533	Needleton	14	3 00 "
10 00 "	543	Elk Park	6	2 25 "
11 30 A.M.	547	Silverton	0	1 55 P.M.
		ARRIVE	LEAVE	

ESPANOLA BRANCH.

No. 476	Mls	April 29, 1894.	Mls	No. 476
*11 40 A.M.	279	lve. Antonito. δ arr.	91	5 00 P.M.
12 14 NO'N	290	Palmita	80	4 21 "
12 35 NO'N	297	Volcano	73	3 57 "
1 04 P.M.	306	No Agua	64	3 27 "
1 28 "	314	Tres Piedras	56	3 02 "
1 43 "	319	Connell	51	2 45 "
1 59 "	323	Servilleta	47	12 05 "
2 58 "	335	Caliente	35	1 23 P.M.
3 24 "	344	Barranca	26	12 55 NO'N
4 04 "	351	Embudo	19	12 15 NO'N
4 31 "	359	Alcalde	11	11 50 A.M.
4 51 "	365	Chamita	5	11 31 "
5 10 P.M.	370	arr. Espanola. δ lve.	0	*11 15 A.M.

Toltec

As the rails climb higher towards Cumbres, the valley below grows ever deeper, and the terrain more spectacular. Nearing Toltec, the line circles around raw volcanic rock outcroppings such as those at right — being smokily negotiated by diamond-stacked 2-8-0s nos. 43 and 202. A few miles beyond, after passing through the second of the only two tunnels on the entire D&RG narrow gauge, the line bursts out over the breath-taking precipice of Toltec Gorge. The two views here (one taken from a rock promontory only part way down into the Gorge) are probably of the same train, apparently a construction special at the time the line was being built. The precarious wooden trestle-work was later replaced by a substantial rock wall and fill.



Two photos: State Historical Society of Colo.



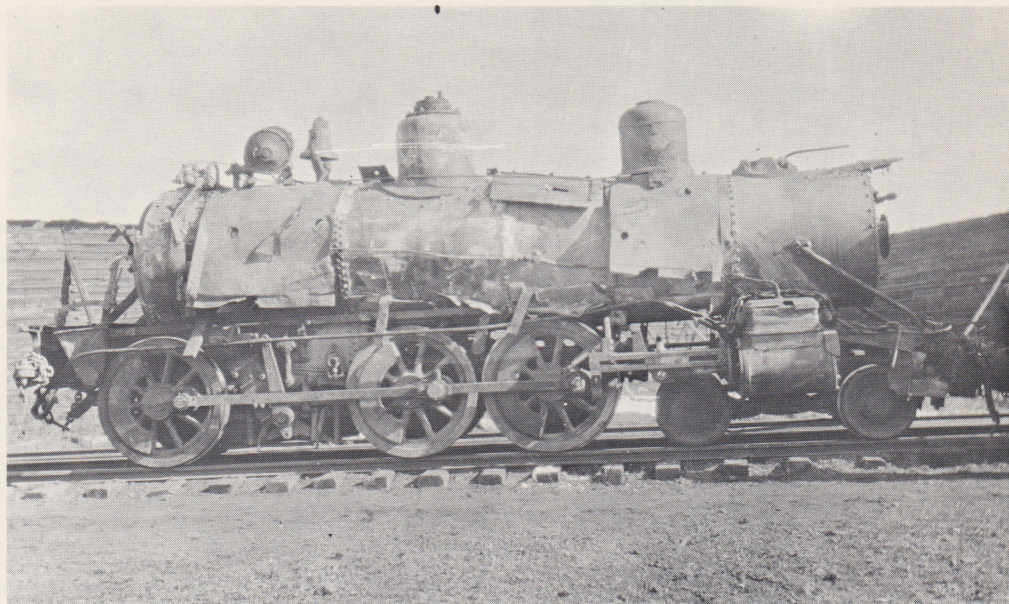


William H. Jackson, from State Historical Society of Colo.



Donald Duke — Golden West Books

the steep side of Cumbres

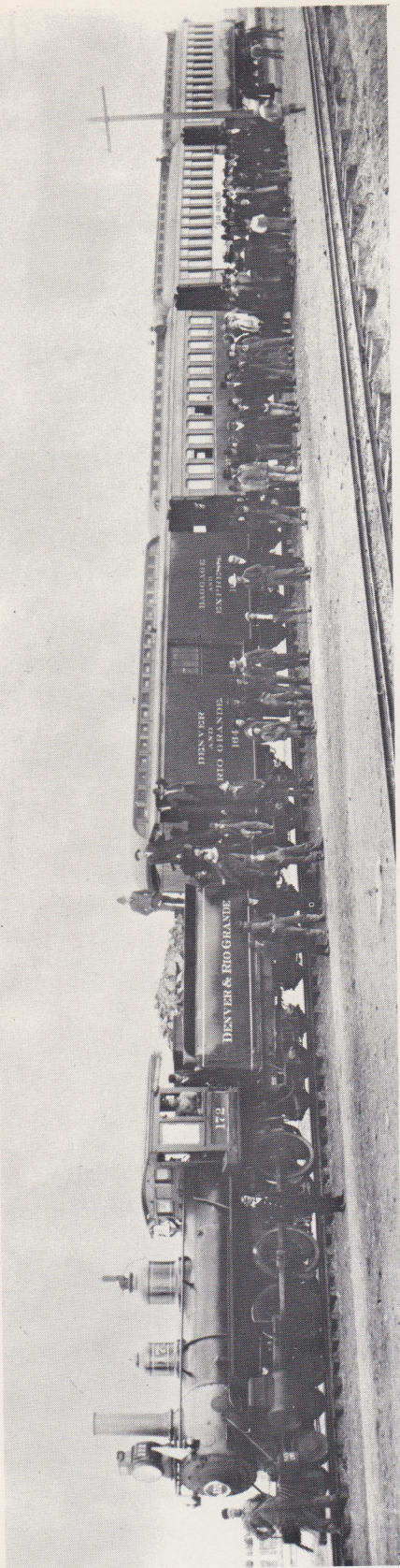


C. R. Lively from Gus Smarey

In contrast to the long, winding, gradual ascent to Cumbres from the east, the line drops precipitously down the west side in a steady 4% grade to the Chama Valley. Around 1908 early-day railroad photographer Fred Jukes worked on the line, and took this classic view (left below) of 2-8-0 no. 417 helping the regular tenwheeler road engine with the daily five-car eastbound passenger out of Chama for "the hill" (Cumbres). That the trip was not always a smooth one is attested to by the photos on this page. Above, one of the tenwheelers set out at Cumbres after a particularly bad tumble. The tender from one such scrape is over the side near Toltec yet. Below, a photographer named Passmore recorded for posterity this unfortunate dumping of the westbound passenger halfway between Cresco and Lobato. Tenwheeler 169 has turned turtle and lost its cab, while the baggage, mail-smoker 240, coach and Pullman sleeper have scattered zig-zag. Steamer trunks and other personal effects are being salvaged as a clutch of little 2-8-0s (led by the 45 and 61) come to the rescue at left.

Museum Collection from O. O. Kenton





A D&RG agricultural promotion special photographed at Romeo, just south of Alamosa, by O. T. Davis in 1909. Although not a regular train, the consist is nevertheless typical of the time. (State Hist. Soc. of Colo.)

changed for Pagosa Springs, at twenty minutes before noon, and finally halted at the temporary operating terminus at Arboles at 2:35 p.m. It was a long, hard trip, even by rail.

The track reached the Florida River early in July, and the grading camp at that site was the scene of a violent gunfight over the ownership of a revolver, resulting in one dead, three badly wounded, and one slightly nicked. Sheriff Hunter from Durango arrested three of the participants — the wounded ones — but the others got away.

Rails finally reached Durango at 5 p.m. on Wednesday, July 27, 1881. That afternoon the assayer, F. A. Foin, had made a silver spike from ore from the Junction Creek Mines, and when the track reached G and Railroad Streets, the spike was driven in a little ceremony presided over by Mayor Taylor. But the big celebration was scheduled for August 5, with a special excursion train due to arrive from Alamosa and points east. The town madly threw itself into planning a program including a parade, races, a dance, speeches, a shooting match, and a baseball game between Durango and Silverton teams. Meanwhile, in the next few days a freight and pay train arrived, but there was still no passenger service over the new and still wobbly rails.

On the day of the great celebration, the parade marched up one street and down another, but still no train appeared. Finally, J. L. Pennington announced to the crowd that the train had been delayed by washouts, and the people had to go ahead without the excursionists.

Weather had seemed to conspire against the Denver & Rio Grande all during those two years of construction. It was not the snowstorms themselves that caused most of the trouble, but the melting snows of spring, coupled with spring and summer rains. On the line over Cumbres, fills settled and cuts sloughed in over the rails. Swollen streams attacked new and untried bridges. A new railroad track undergoes a process of appreciation over a considerable period; the fills solidify and wild grasses cover bare earth and fight erosion. The track becomes more solid over a period of months before the counter process of depreciation sets in. The Cumbres

line was still new and raw and unduly susceptible to the elements. The day before the great celebration in Durango rain fell heavily from noon 'til four southeast of Durango, and the Rio Navajo tore out one bent of the railroad bridge. Even then a train might have been run out of Durango to pick up passengers who could have crossed the stream on foot where the train could not, but four miles to the west, the same rains washed out a large fill, leaving a gap trains could not cover which was too great for passengers to walk. Durango's initial experience with the railroad was not exactly auspicious.

Durango was not the end of the line anyway; it was merely a stop on the extension to Silverton. Engineer Thomas Wigglesworth and a survey and grading party were already at work in the canyon above Rockwood, where his men were lowered over the cliff with ropes and scaling ladders to locate the line and drill and blast the rocks. Track-laying ceased temporarily at Durango and some workmen were transferred to the Gunnison Extension, but on October 3, 1881, crews began laying rails northward to Rockwood, which they reached December 11, before stopping for the worst of the winter.

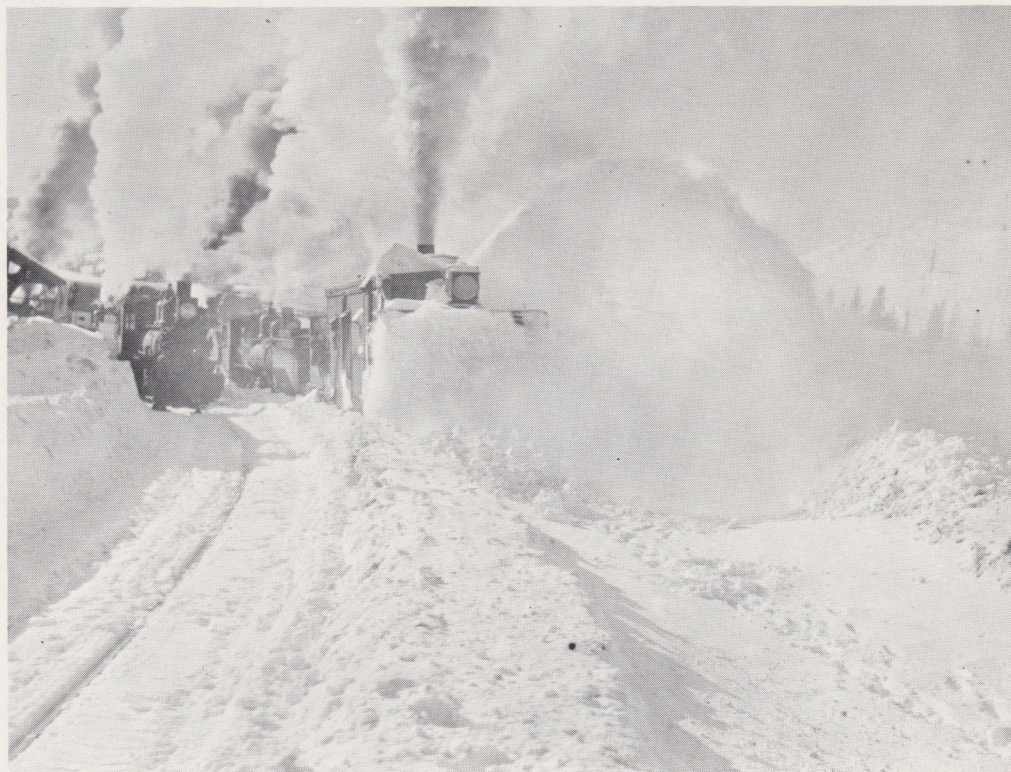
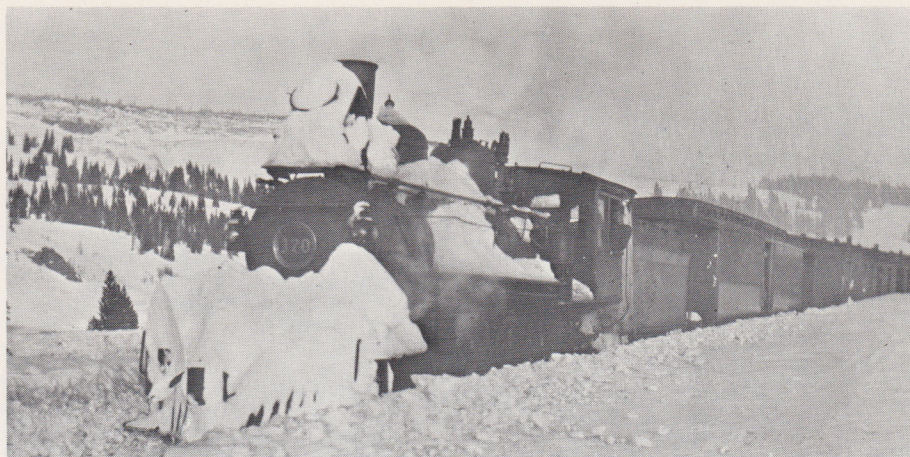
Near the end of the following March the company resumed laying track north from Rockwood, but three miles into the canyon ran out of rail, and had to discharge the construction crews until more arrived. The Colorado Coal and Iron Company of South Pueblo had failed to deliver rails on schedule. These rails, first to be rolled in Colorado, where made on April 28 and 29, 1882, and finally reached the Silverton Extension late in May, when tracklaying resumed and reached Silverton on July 8.

Surveyors continued running their lines over canyon and pass, from Silverton to Howardsville and Red Mountain, from Hermosa to Rico, from Durango to Dolores and Rico, and wherever there seemed business for the tentacles of steel. But the Denver and Rio Grande had over-extended itself, and it would be left to other companies to build further into the San Juan Mountains.

Now the railroad could run the passenger trains over the whole line from Denver to the silver camps on

Over Cumbres in Snow

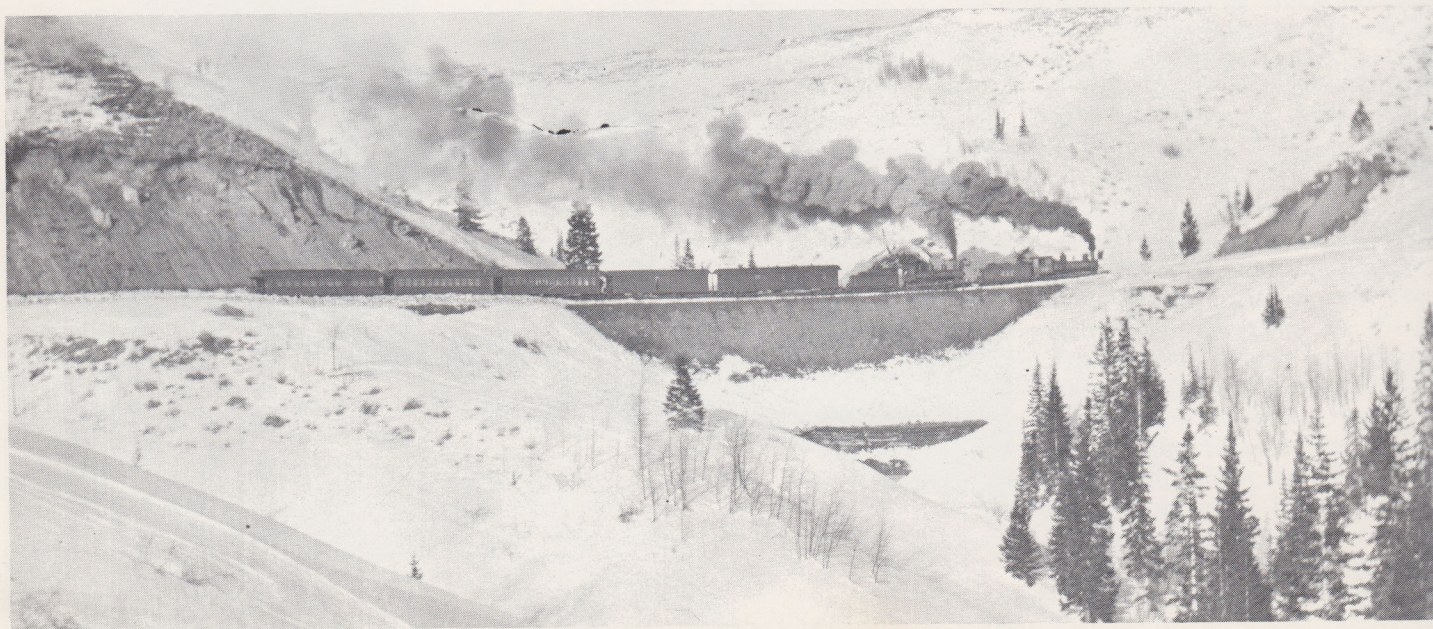
For many years in the early part of the century C. R. Lively was the agent at Cumbres. Fortunately, Mr. Lively owned a camera and knew how to use it, and was wont to bring it out on occasion to photograph unusual events — snow, wrecks, or even the passing of the daily passenger train. Usually, the snow was not severe and the passenger train could buck its way through the intermittent drifts without trouble, thus also keeping the line open and clear for the slower-moving freights. One fine day in May in 1915, however, the drifts must have been deeper than usual, as tenwheeler 170 arrived at Cumbres with the pilot piled high with snow and the headlight knocked askew. Other times Cumbres would be visited by epic storms, requiring the services of the rotary, pushed by a string of struggling little 2-8-0s. Mr. Lively was at hand, and these dramatic photos resulted. (C. R. Lively from Gus Smarey)





Cumbres a Half Century Ago

Working in the thin light of late winter afternoons, Lively made these remarkable portraits of the eastbound passenger train approaching Windy Point (just west of Cumbres) in snow, about 1910-1915. Left, the double-headed train can be seen threading the snowsheds that once stood below Coxo Siding, while at bottom the entire train is stretched out for the camera — helper 417, road engine 170, mail car, baggage, two coaches, and chair car. At right, Lively's camera follows the train around Windy Point from a lower vantage point, and again the snowsheds are in evidence. Finally, bottom right, the westbound passenger train steams into Cumbres through a deep snow cut. (C. R. Lively from Gus Smarey)



the Rio de Las Animas Perdidas — the River of Lost Souls.

On April 22, 1883, the railway issued its twenty-second employees' timetable. The new Alamosa-Silverton line was a part of the Second Division, administered by Superintendent Cole Lydon from Alamosa. The passenger train over Cumbres was Number 5 westbound and Number 6 in the other direction. Leaving Denver at 2:35 in the afternoon, it struggled over Veta Pass and reached Alamosa at 3:55 a.m. Continuing on down the valley, at 5:15 it was heading westward from Antonito, and by dawn it was climbing through the sagebrush toward the forested slopes of the Conejos Range. At 6:35 a.m., the little 4-4-0 locomotive pulled into Big Horn, where the railroad operated a small eating house and the passengers had twenty minutes in which to step down and eat breakfast. At 6:55 the engineer whistled off and headed his train for Toltec Gorge and the pass. At 8:20 the engine was passing Osier, at 8:40 Los Pinos. At 9:20 it was at the summit, where there was a water tank, a station, and a snowshed-covered wye. Besides water, coal was available at Sublette, Osier, Los Pinos and Cumbres. Ahead lay Coxo, Siding No. 9, Lobato, and Chama. Chama had a roundhouse and shops, and the railroad's boarding and eating house, where the train paused for another twenty-minute meal stop, though it was yet only the middle of the morning.

Leaving Chama at 10:55, the passenger train went on through Willow Creek and Azotea and Monero, the coal-mining town. Three minutes after noon it was in Amargo; here was the connection with Pagosa Springs. At the Springs in those years was an army camp, soon to be moved to the new Fort Lewis west of Durango. The military operated its own stage service with the customary use of army ambulances as passenger vehicles. On specified days when Indians from the nearby Jicarilla Apache agency were to be issued their annuities, Amargo was a busy little camp with an ample supply of soldiers on hand, the yellow trouser stripes of cavalry mixing with the light blue of infantry, and the Eugenie bonnets of curious officers' wives and daughters bobbing among the spectators. Old



Christopher Carson, the famous "Kit" Carson, dead since '68, had whipped these Indians two decades earlier, and they were a pretty tame lot by the time the railroad came through.

But they could *look* menacing enough, and one engineer recalled the ominous crowd which had gathered around his work-train engine near Ignacio one day. Despite a spell of hot weather, he had locked himself in the cab, acutely aware of the Winchester which hung from the cab roof. But those dusky faces, so solemn and strange to him, signified curiosity more than hostility, and Indian troubles were about the only kind the railroad didn't face.

Westward lay Dulce, Navajo, Juanita, and Carracas, where at 1:25 the eastbound and westbound trains met and passed. The little train was now nearing the end of its run as it steamed into Durango at 4:25 p.m.

At Durango the passengers had a brief ten minute lay-over before continuing on toward Silverton. At Hermosa, eleven miles north of Durango, the passenger northbound passed a side-tracked southbound freight at 5:25. It took another half hour to climb through the pine-studded hills to Rockwood, a full hour to run from Rockwood through the canyon of the River of Lost Souls to Cascade siding. At 7:10 the little train was at Needleton, under the brooding spires of the aptly named Needle Mountains; forty minutes later coal smoke from the train was drifting through Elk Park and around Garfield Peak. Finally, at 8:20 p.m., the weary passengers could step down onto the wooden station platform in Silverton and board a horse-drawn hack for one of the hotels uptown. The engine would be put away in the little two-stall roundhouse which stood a couple of hundred feet south of the station, on the other side of the tracks.

Silverton, which had been a thriving mining camp since the early 1870's, lay in a particularly beautiful setting. Baker's Park — "park" was frontier terminology for a high mountain valley surrounded by peaks — was a small flat meadow only a mile or so in diameter, ringed by towering peaks separated by four canyons. Two on the north and one

on the west fed mountain streams into the park, and in the southwestern corner the precipitous canyon of the River of Lost Souls drained the glacial waters toward the San Juan. In the center of the park, amid alpine grasses, lay the dirt streets and the log, frame, brick and stone buildings of Silverton, containing a variety of Victorian hotels, saloons, druggists, assayers, wagon freighters, brothels, and all of the typical establishments of a frontier mining town. The arrival of the railroad was stimulating an already booming economy, and within two decades each of the four canyons which met in Baker's Park would boast its own individual narrow gauge. But in 1883 the newly completed Denver & Rio Grande Railway alone spit its fiery cinders of coal into the rare mountain air.

The passenger returning from Silverton to Denver had to be on the cars by six in the morning for the run down the canyon to Durango. Reaching the latter town at 9:35, the train paused but ten minutes, and then headed east to Arboles, where at 12:32 the passengers were given an 18-minute lunch stop. The train reached Cumbres at 5:48 in the evening and Alamosa not until 11 p.m. Then Denver-bound passengers would not reach their destination until a quarter after noon the next day. The Victorian opulence of the cars, both inside and out, hardly compensated for the fatigue of the thirty hour trip from Silverton to Denver.

The regular through passenger trains would operate under varied names down through the years. At first the westbound was called the *Durango Mail*, and the eastbound, logically, the *Denver Mail*, attesting to the importance of the federal postal contracts which played an important part in supporting the trains. At one time the westbound was known as the *Colorado, New Mexico and San Juan Express*, while in the other direction it was the *San Juan, New Mexico and Colorado Express* — the sequence merely reversed with direction. Around the turn of the century the passenger trains were called the *Colorado and New Mexico Express*, and then a couple of decades later, as the *San Juan and New Mexico Express*. In its last years, the passenger route

was known as the *San Juan Express*.

The engines with their Russia-iron boiler jackets and gold lettering, and the little Tuscan red passenger coaches, varnished to a mirror-finish with gold-leaf striping and gold lettering above the windows, hauled a steady flow of tourists and travelers over the heights of Cumbres. In the earliest years little 4-4-0 locomotives hauled the "varnish," but they were soon replaced with heavier 4-6-0 passenger engines of the 160-174 series. Diamond stacks remained on most of the freight engines until about 1910, but the passenger engines lost theirs before the turn of the century.

In the late '80s, under the direction of its General Passenger and Ticket Agent, "Major" Shadrack K. Hooper, the Denver & Rio Grande began to advertise "Around the Circle" tours, and coaches were especially lettered for that service. There was at that date no complete narrow gauge circle, but the gap, between Silverton and Ouray, was a small one. Out of Denver the traveler rode to Pueblo, Walsenburg, over Veta Pass to Alamosa, over Cumbres to Durango, and north to Silverton. There he boarded one of the Watson stages for the jolting ride over spectacular Sheridan Pass (later to be called Red Mountain Pass) to Ouray. At Ouray, after 1887 he could again board the railroad to ride north to Montrose and then east over the main line from Salt Lake City via Gunnison, Salida and the Royal Gorge to Pueblo.

In succeeding years, the narrow gauge circle was modified by railroad growth in the San Juan country and in the San Luis Park. In 1887 toll-road builder Otto Mears began his Silverton Railroad which was in the 1890's to connect Silverton over Red Mountain Pass with Ironton, leaving but a nine mile gap between the latter camp and Ouray for Watson's stages to complete. In 1890, Mears began laying the rails of the Rio Grande Southern Railroad from Ridgway (on the D&RG's Ouray Branch) to tap the mining camps of Ophir and Telluride. In the next two years, he completed the new line all the way south and east over Lizard Head Pass, through Rico and Dolores and Mancos and over Cima Summit to Durango. In 1892 the circle of narrow gauge rails was complete!

But of course the western end of the circle constituted 160 miles of railroad not owned by the Denver & Rio Grande, and the latter preferred not to give business to the new RGS if it could avoid doing so. Consequently Major Hooper's advertising pamphlets, while they did include the RGS, continued to feature the route via Silverton and the short Silverton Railroad with the connecting nine-mile stage trip from Ironton to Ouray.

A more important modification to the narrow gauge circle occurred to the east in 1890. From Mears Junction, on the main line from Salida over Marshall Pass to Salt Lake City, southward over Poncha Pass to Villa Grove in the San Luis Valley and on to the iron mines at Orient on its eastern edge, the railroad had in 1881 built a branch line to carry ore. Spurred by the possibilities of a great farming boom in the northern end of the broad valley, in 1890 the Rio Grande connected Villa Grove with Alamosa. The 53 miles of narrow gauge track was entirely straight between the two points, unique on the Rio Grande system. Upon its completion, this connection bisected the existing narrow gauge circle, creating for a brief period two narrow gauge circles, the one westward via the Rio Grande Southern and another to the east via Walsenburg and Pueblo.

The company meanwhile had been experimenting with standard gauge since 1888. By 1890 third rail (forming a dual gauge utilizing one rail in common) had been laid from Denver to Trinidad, and the company had already begun removing the middle rail which formed the narrow gauge on selected segments, leaving a standard gauge to replace the dual gauge. In 1891 the middle rail was lifted from the dual gauge between Pueblo and the town of La Veta (not Veta Pass), thus converting the eastern end of the old narrow gauge circle to standard gauge. And so after 1891, the narrow gauge circle was a smaller one connected from Alamosa to Salida on the eastern edge, rather than from Alamosa to Walsenburg, Pueblo, and Salida.

The immediate consequence of this change was the necessity of re-routing both the narrow gauge freight traffic and the passenger

trains from Denver and Pueblo to the San Juan country, to go through the Royal Gorge to Salida and over Poncha Pass to Alamosa, rather than by way of Walsenburg and Veta Pass.

A timetable for January, 1896, showed the *Colorado & New Mexico Express* leaving Denver at 7:45 p.m. and arriving at Salida at 4:30 a.m., while the passengers were still asleep in their coaches or, in the case of the more affluent ones, in the Pullman Palace Car sleepers. After a fifteen minute layover in Salida, the *Express* headed up the grade to Mears Junction, where it turned south to cross Poncha Pass. The long, monotonous stretch of straight track in the semi-desert northern end of the San Luis Valley was crossed as dawn broke over the heights of the Sangre de Cristo Range, and indeed the red alpenglow of the first rays of the morning sun on the snows of Mount Blanca seemed to resemble the blood of Christ for which the Spanish conquistadors of a past century had named the peaks. At 8:15 the little train reached Alamosa, and its yawning occupants stepped down for breakfast. They had a brief 25 minutes in which to eat. From there westward the schedule was typical of earlier years to Durango, which the *Express* reached, if on time, at 6:45 p.m. These were years when the Durango-Silverton line was handled as a branch, and it was necessary for the passenger to stay overnight in one of the hotels before boarding the Silverton "accommodation" train at 7:30 the next morning.

That was not a good decade for the railroad. In 1892 the price of silver began a decline from which it never recovered; and the flood of mining ventures, which had impelled the railroad to throw out its octopus-like tentacles in every direction, suddenly evaporated, leaving the Denver and Rio Grande high and dry. The financial crisis reached its zenith in the summer of 1893. The "Panic of 1893," as it came to be called, was in some respects the worst depression of the century, and lasted nearly four years. About eight thousand American businesses collapsed, and dozens of railroads went into receivership. The Sherman Silver Purchase Act of 1890 was, oddly enough, permitting a

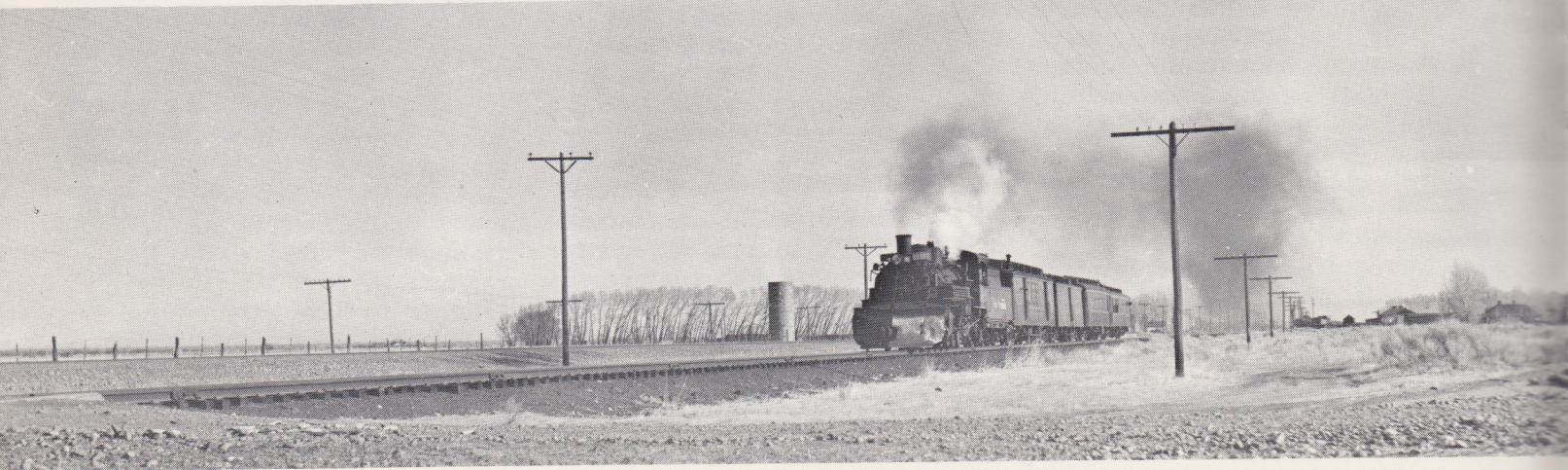
disastrous drain of gold from the treasury, and a reluctant President Cleveland was forced to call for its repeal. Although friends of silver in Congress announced that "Hell would freeze over" before they repealed the act, Cleveland nevertheless forced the measure through, and in November the government placed a ban on the purchase of silver for coinage purposes. It was a blow from which many mining camps never recovered. Coming as it did a mere decade after the Denver and Rio Grande had reached most of the camps, its effect on the railroad was not much less disastrous. Visions of future earnings disappeared before the directors' eyes.

A new timetable of November 12, 1899, introduced yet another major change in the operation of the *Colorado and New Mexico Express*. An entirely new standard gauge line had been built over La Veta Pass, bypassing by many miles the old narrow gauge Veta Pass route. Now a standard gauge train made the trip from Denver and Pueblo to Alamosa overnight, providing coach and Pullman sleeper service; the narrow gauge train for Durango made an early morning connection. Initially Pullman sleepers continued to be provided on the narrow gauge portion of the journey, but as it was a daylight trip of reasonable length the sleepers were soon dispensed with — for all time. Actually, Pullman sleeper service on the narrow gauge had been rather flexible for the entire two decades. There is evidence that sleepers were run right through to Silverton for a few months after service was begun, but thereafter sleeper service seems to have been terminated at Durango. During the '80s Pullmans were in short supply on the narrow gauge, and for a great deal of this time no sleeper service was offered west of Alamosa, although "chair cars" were provided in such cases in addition to coaches. After the main line was standard gauged in 1890, Pullmans were available and were then operated through from Denver to Durango via Salida a great deal of the time. Even then — in 1894, for example — there were times when sleeper service was offered on a Denver-Salida and Salida-Durango basis, which certainly must have been inconvenient.

After dropping of the through

7:00 AM from Alamosa

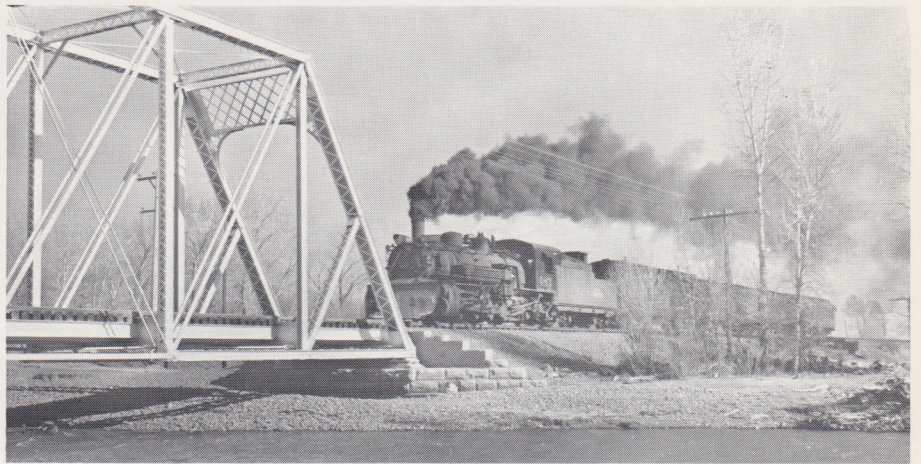
In later years, 7 o'clock became a magic time at the Alamosa station, as the little narrow gauge train coupled up and departed for the high country beyond. The standard gauge train from Denver, which arrived at 4:30, might have yielded a few through passengers, and other local patrons scurried on at the last minute. In winter the normal 5-car consist was sometimes reduced by one coach, and in later years a 480-series might often spell the smaller 470s. On one occasion in 1949-1950, when the line was tied up by snow and narrow gauge power in short supply, a three car "stub" run was made to Antonito using narrow gauge cars and standard gauge 2-8-0 no. 1146. Once clear of the Alamosa yard, the little narrow gauge 2-8-2s would fly down the straight, well-maintained dual gauge right of way across the flat San Luis Valley at a brisk clip. (Top, C. W. Hauck; bottom two, R. W. Richardson.)



train via Salida, the Valley Line north of Alamosa remained a part of the Third Division operated from Salida, and was served by a little mixed train. (The lines west of Alamosa were by this time known as the Fourth Division.)

By 1905 it seemed necessary to build a branch south from Durango to Farmington to preempt the grade, primarily in order to keep the Southern Pacific's subsidiary, the Arizona & Colorado Railroad, from building into S.P. coal holdings near Durango, as well as to capture the agricultural traffic of the Farmington basin. The Farmington branch was built standard gauge using equipment shipped dismantled over the narrow gauge main line across Cumbres and assembled in Durango. This was done in anticipation of building a standard gauge line into Durango; after all, the rest of the system was being progressively standard gauged, and inevitably, the management thought, this would happen west of Alamosa. Further steps in that direction were taken in 1909 when the bridges at Cascade and Wolf Creeks were replaced with steel bridges of standard gauge dimensions. About the same time, section crews began using standard gauge ties in the tie replacement program.

Another plan developed around 1915 contemplated by-passing Cumbres and building an entirely new standard gauge line from South Fork, west of Alamosa, over the mountains to Juanita, and standard gauging the line from Juanita into Durango. Including an estimated \$300,000 for improving shop facilities in Alamosa and Durango, the anticipated cost of the proposed line was \$4,800,000. Still another step recommended by the D&RG engineering department was the building of a standard gauge from Arboles down the San Juan River to Farmington, thence up the La Plata Valley through Mancos into the Montezuma Valley. But the railroad was beset with financial ills, due in part to the Western Pacific burden, and its management became preoccupied with economizing. The Farmington branch remained an orphan standard gauge segment isolated by narrow gauge on all sides, until 1923. Following a petition from Farmington citizens to change the gauge in order to eliminate the



Early morning stops at La Jara (above) and Romeo — pronounced la harrah and row-may-oh — catered to a substantial milk and express business. After crossing the Conejos River bridge — the only noteworthy landmark on the 30-mile stretch — the little train would slip into Antonito about 8 A.M. Here once upon a time the Santa Fe train (at right, bottom) separated from the Durango train. (Top, C. W. Hauck; others, R. W. Richardson.)



Sublette is one of the few stations on the long, lonely climb to Cumbres. The upper view is a typical winter scene, while in the summer view below the sidetracked passenger (with parlor car Alamosa) waits for a freight powered by the 484 to thread past. (R. W. Richardson)

interchange problem in Durango, the railroad management resigned itself to the fact there was no immediate prospect of building standard gauge from Alamosa to Durango, and one weekend had the Farmington line narrowed to conform with the rest.

These same decades witnessed continual modernization of equipment. Due to an interstate commerce law, the Rio Grande was required to have automatic couplers on its equipment by September, 1903; the railroad had neglected to do this, and was forced into a crash program to apply knuckle couplers to the freight cars. The passenger equipment had been built with Miller Hook Couplers, which qualified as automatic; however, it was necessary gradually to change the Miller to knuckle in order to standardize couplings on locomotives and to permit mixed train service.

The same economy drive that doomed extensions and relocations in the San Juan country resulted in changes to passenger color schemes. On October 22, 1912, the Superintendent of Motive Power and the Car Department, J. F. Enright, wrote from Burnham that due to the ex-

pense, the railroad had decided to discontinue striping the passenger equipment with gold paint. At the same time, he decided to phase out the use of imitation gold paint for the remaining lettering and to go back to the use of genuine gold leaf, as the additional expense for the real article was more than compensated for by the fact it lasted considerably longer.

Six years later the whole paint scheme was changed. On September 6, 1918, Enright's successor, W. W. Leman, wrote the division superintendents:

We have in the past, painted our narrow gauge equipment a Tuscan red, but as economy will result from the use of the Pullman [green] color, as we figure about 3 months longer service and \$1.25 per car less cost for material, wish you would arrange hereafter as narrow gauge equipment passes through the shop, to adopt the Pullman color as our standard.

Since this was to be done only as cars came in for other repairs, the *San Juan & New Mexico Express* soon assumed a mixed color scheme, with shiny, freshly painted Pullman

green cars among faded and weathered Tuscan red coaches. Gold remained the color used for lettering.

What was it like to travel over Cumbres on the *San Juan & New Mexico Express* of say, 1919? Let's travel back in time and see.

The eight little passenger cars, some red, some green, await their customers at the Alamosa depot in the early rays of the morning sun. At 7 a.m., the engineer on No. 172 pulls twice on the whistle cord, eases back the throttle, and they are off and running. Ahead lies the 29 miles of nearly straight and level track down the valley, through the little towns of Henry, Estrella, La Jara, Bountiful, and Romeo. Arriving at Antonito at 8:20, the passengers spy another little 4-6-0 locomotive waiting outside the single-track, two-locomotive capacity engine house, waiting for passenger coaches to be added to its freight cars so it can go about its business as the *Denver and Santa Fe Mixed*. A baggage-mail car and two coaches are cut out of the *San Juan* for the trip to Santa Fe, and will reach the New Mexican capital at 4:25 that afternoon.

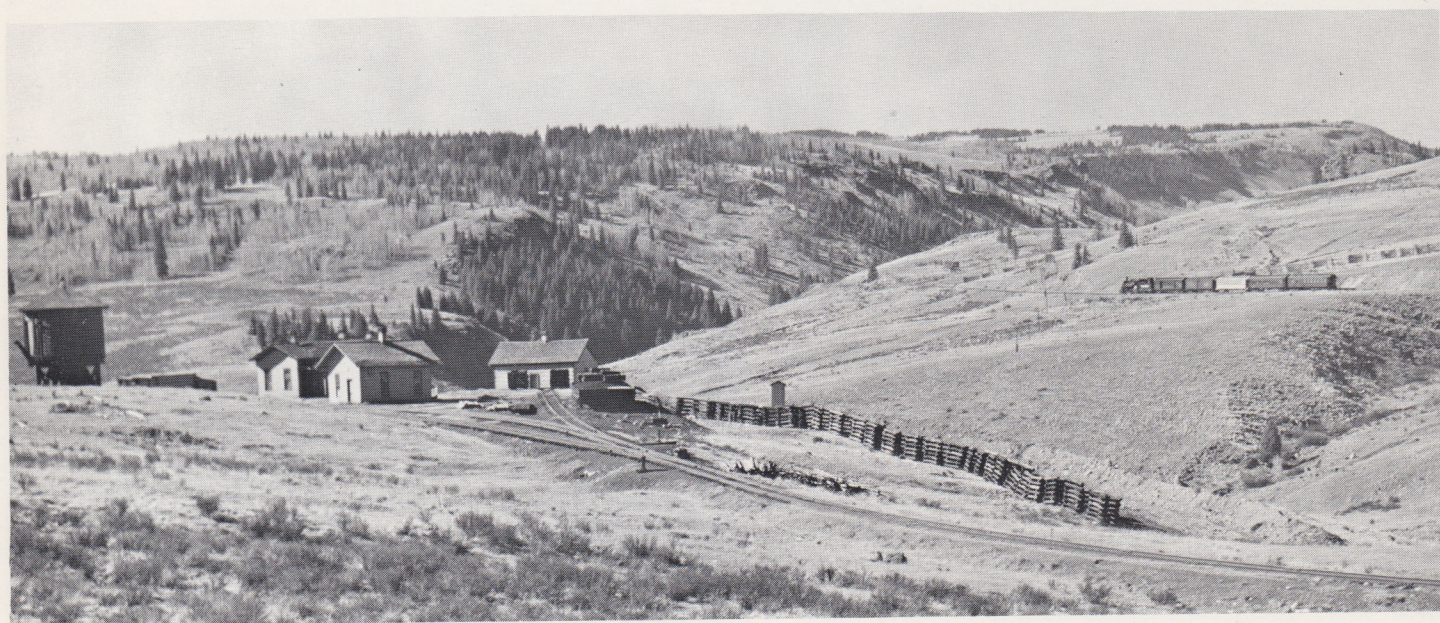
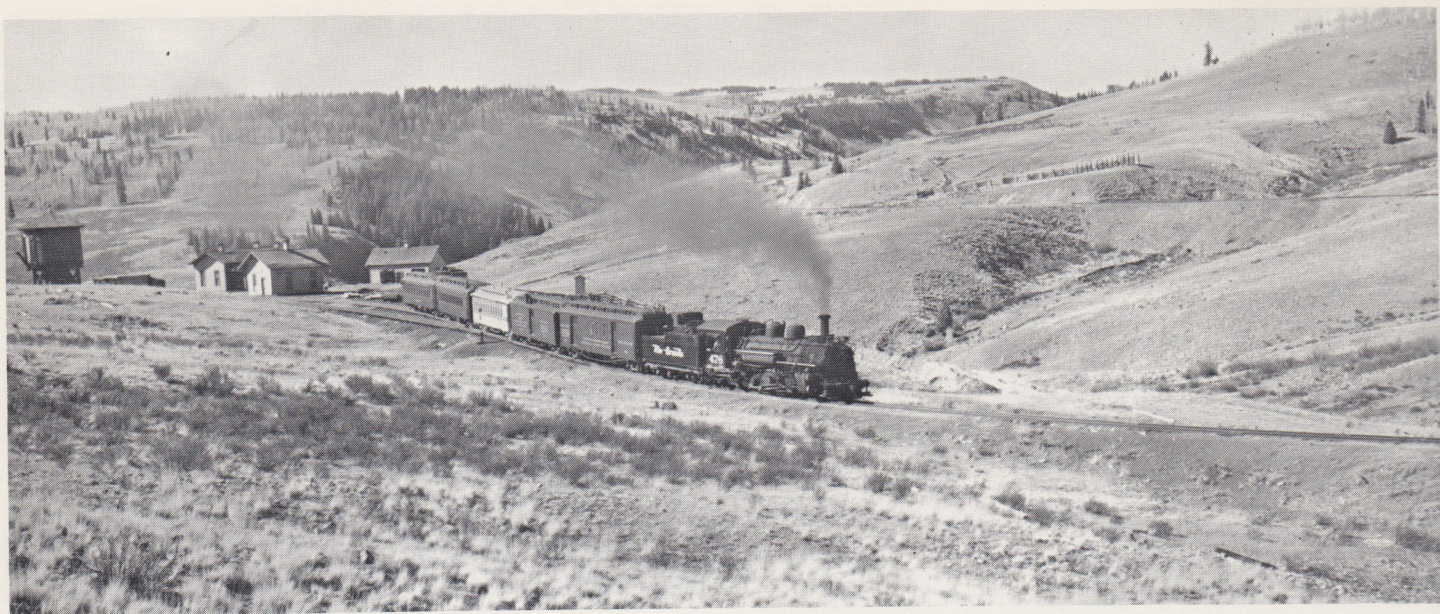
The remaining five cars of the *San Juan and New Mexico Express* depart Antonito westward for the heights of Cumbres, where clouds are already beginning to gather for afternoon thundershowers. Ahead lies wild mountain country, with nothing along the railroad but a few section houses until the top of the pass is reached. Oddly, the Conejos Range is almost entirely devoid of mining ventures; timber remains its primary resource. The little engine puffs steadily up the moderate grade, spewing diamond-hard cinders of coal everywhere — into eyes, pockets, purses, carpetbags. The railroad climbs in and out of side canyons which pour their streams into the Los Pinos, not even pausing at the double loop at Big Horn, once the breakfast stop for passengers in the 1880's. A little further is the "Mud Tunnel," its insubstantial earthen walls reinforced with timbers, and the spectacular conglomerate needles of Phantom Curve towering above the little train. Finally the rock tunnel at Toltec looms ahead, and just out of the west portal the *San Juan* makes a five minute stop to enable passengers to gape at the thousand-foot depths and read the inscription on



Toltec

Toltec (seen in earlier years on page 5) is the spectacular high-point on the east approach to Cumbres. Looking across the chasm (right), the defile appears deceptively narrow; but as the train moves west along the side of the hill, some idea of the mammoth scale of the setting can be grasped. (All, R. W. Richardson)





West of Toltec lies the lonely, windswept station of Osier. Here the 478 has just made its station stop at top, while the lower photo shows it a few moments later on the far side of the valley, climbing into the bright autumn sunshine of an October, 1950, morning. Nearing Los Pinos (right), the valley broadens and the floor of the valley gradually rises to meet the still climbing rails. (R. W. Richardson)





the San Juan and Cumbres Pass

High, beautiful, desolate, windy, Cumbres was a fitting climax to a ride on the San Juan. Here the little train, powered by the familiar 473, pauses for the station stop before beginning the 4% descent to Chama. Brakes were always carefully checked (right), and passengers could stretch their legs briefly. The drumhead sign on the rear of the parlor car lent a dignified touch — and on occasion the railfans were perplexed by the appearance of the drumhead from the long-discontinued Shavano (Salida-Gunnison) instead. During final days of operation (below), when snow and extra cars required two engines, the loneliness of Cumbres became even more marked because the familiar two-floor passenger depot had already been torn down in a fit of management cost-cutting. (All R. W. Richardson)



the Garfield Monument. Just out of the west portal of the tunnel the track originally crossed a short wooden trestle built on stonework foundations against the cliff wall; by 1905 the railroad had replaced this with a solid fill and safer, impressive rock wall.

Rolling down the track again, the train soon passes Osier, now nothing more than a section house and tank, but in construction days a roaring log-cabin town. The country ahead is green with wild grasses, but the hills are sparsely forested, never having recovered their growth after the disastrous fire which swept the Los Pinos area in 1879. The canyon has become a shallow valley, and soon the train is just a few feet above the River of the Pines. After crossing the little stream, the rails curve back in a huge horseshoe, and begin the final climb up Cumbres Creek. Through another double horseshoe, a much sharper one called Tanglefoot Curve, the *San Juan* gains final altitude and is at the top. Here is a station, section house, a water tank, and a snowshed-covered wye. Members of the crew make an inspection of the airbrakes which will be sorely needed on the steep descent to Chama, and again the train is off and running. This afternoon on the return eastbound trip the *Express* will require a helper engine, probably a 2-8-0 locomotive of the 200 or 400 series, to climb this steep grade to the top.

On schedule, the train slows to a stop in Chama at one minute to noon, and the conductor announces a twenty-one minute lunch stop. The Chama yard is full of engines and cars, some locomotives switching, others waiting to make hill turns — hauling a small number of freight cars up the steep grade to the summit, where the cars will be set out on a siding and the double or triple-headed engines will repeat the process until there are enough cars at the top to make up a train for the downhill run east to Alamosa. Chama in 1919 is a busy railroad and lumbering town, permeated by the pungent aroma of coal smoke, the hiss of steam, and the scream of whistles.

Westward from Chama the little train puffs over the Continental Divide near Willow Creek. Contrary to popular assumption, Cumbres, the highest point on the railroad, is *not*

the divide, which is actually crossed in unimpressive foothill country that hardly seems to be the “crest of the continent”.

Onward the train runs, through Azotea, past Biggs Spur, and into the coal-mining town of Monero. Monero is where the eastbound and westbound passenger trains meet and pass. Westward from Monero is Amargo, of little importance since the days when it was end of track, and Lumberton and Dulce.

At Lumberton, two other railroads joined the Rio Grande. In 1895, E. M. Biggs (who had operated a lumber railroad built three miles south of Chama in 1888, and extended another eleven and a half miles in 1896 to Ensenada) formed the New Mexico Lumber Company and incorporated the Rio Grande and Pagosa Springs Railroad to build north from Lumberton. The company had established its shops in a new town called Edith, after Biggs' little daughter, six miles north of Lumberton. The RG&PS was a typical lumber line whose branches wandered around the canyons of the Navajo River and its tributaries. Eventually its rails reached within five miles of Pagosa Springs, but by 1901 another railroad had already connected the resort town with the D&RG. Later, in 1903, the Chama lumber spur was torn up and the rail relaid south of Lumberton to El Vado for the Rio Grande & Southwestern, another new firm owned by Biggs, though it was built with D&RG assistance and the latter planned to absorb it as a part of a connection between Lumberton and Chamita. The RG&PS, meanwhile, had been washed out by the great floods of 1911 and never rebuilt, and its equipment transferred to the Rio Grande & Southwestern. A spur to Gallinas Mountain, another seven miles, was added to the RG&SW's original 33 miles in 1918. A short distance westward, another lumber line ran south, this one from Dulce, operated by both Biggs' New Mexico Lumber and the Sullenbergers' Pagosa Lumber Company.

The *San Juan Express* might pick up a casual passenger or two from any of these connecting lines, but there are no scheduled trains waiting to meet it.

At Pagosa Junction, however, it is a different matter. The Rio

Grande, Pagosa & Northern Railroad, incorporated by the Pagosa Lumber Company, had built north from this point in 1901, using D&RG rails and ties and their own labor. Later operations were taken over by the D&RG, and a mixed train connects with the *Express* — although the lumber company still operates lumber spurs stretching many miles into the woods. The *San Juan and New Mexico Express* is scheduled to arrive at Pagosa Junction, located on Cat Creek (Gato, in Spanish), at 2:35 p.m. Five minutes later the *Denver and Pagosa Springs Mixed* pulls out for the resort springs.

Westward lay the small farming and ranching towns of the San Juan River Valley, and the Ute Indian Reservation town of Ignacio, named for a famous chief. At 5:25 p.m. the *San Juan* pulls into Durango. Here the passenger could stay overnight and take the mixed train to Farmington on the standard gauge segment, known locally as the *Red Apple Flyer*. Here also the D&RG connects with the Rio Grande Southern, whose passenger train goes on to Mancos, Dolores, Rico, Ophir, Telluride, and Ridgway, to complete the west end of the narrow gauge circle.

Just after pulling into the Durango station a baggage-mail car and a coach are uncoupled, and the remnant of the train — a baggage car, a coach, and the parlor car, still constituting the *San Juan Express* — departs for Silverton, arriving at 8:35 p.m., and our trip of half a century ago is completed.

While the line from Durango to Silverton was considered a branch and had a daytime mixed train which would long outlast the *San Juan*, still the *San Juan and New Mexico Express* of 1919 was a through train from Denver to Silverton, and Durango was merely a 15 minute stop enroute, not the terminus.

The returning eastbound *San Juan* had to leave Silverton at 6:20 in the morning in order to arrive in Alamosa at 8:10 p.m. Trains frequently were late, delayed by weather or man, and even when on time it was a long, hard trip.

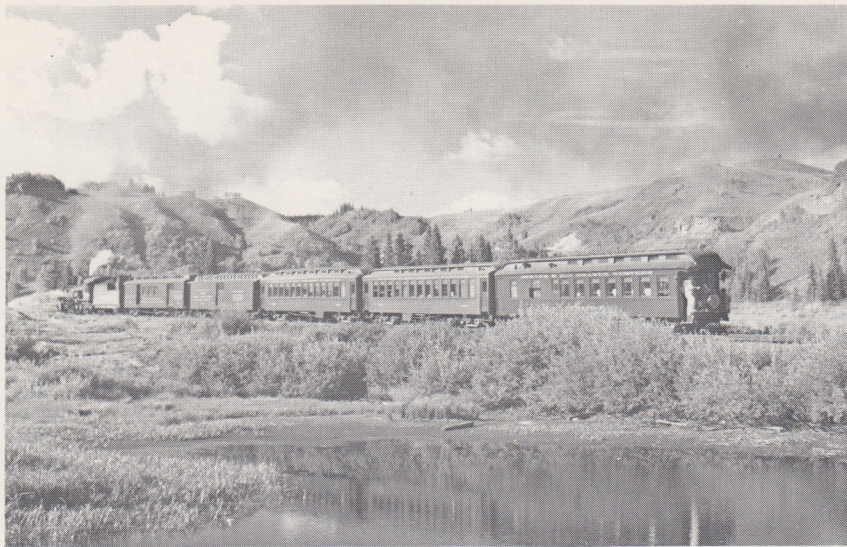
These were years of great variety in equipment used over Cumbres. The heaviest of the narrow gauge engines, the K-27 “Mudhens” built in 1903, provided helper service from



Windy Point

As the train moved west from the Cumbres depot, the panorama of the long valley leading down to Chama, 14 miles beyond, lay spread out before it. A few hundred yards further brought it to Windy Point, which the afternoon (eastbound) train can be seen negotiating from the valley floor below (right) and from train level (below). (Two photos R. W. Richardson; bottom, C. W. Hauck.)





Late on a summer's afternoon the San Juan presented a picture of relaxed, restful travel as it neared Coxo and the top of Cumbres Pass. Earlier it had been charging up the side of the valley near Cresco (below), the little 470-series 2-8-2 barking defiance to the surrounding mountain ridges. (All, R. W. Richardson.)



Chama to the pass, after heavier second-hand 65-pound (weighing 65 lbs. per yard) rail had been laid on that fourteen and a half miles of the route in 1913. But they were outlawed east and west of that short segment of track by the 40 and 45-pound rail which remained. They had to be hauled to Chama dead, at the rear of freight trains, as the rails from Alamosa to Cumbres were too light to carry a K-27 loaded with coal and water. Most frequently used on the steep grade up Cumbres were some of the C-16 and C-19 2-8-0 "Consolidation" type freight locomotives, one of which, No. 406, a Baldwin product of 1881, was named "Cumbres".

In 1923 a passenger on the *San Juan* could observe even more widely varied styles of locomotive in helper service on Cumbres. A shop strike left the Rio Grande increasingly short of power as it was unable to effect necessary repairs, and consequently had to borrow engines from neighboring narrow gauge lines. On August 21, for instance, RGS 12 was to be seen struggling over Lobato Trestle with a haul of merchandise; in September and October Silverton Northern 34 was noted working on the west slope of the pass.

That same year the company completed relaying the whole line from Antonito to Durango with 70 pound rail. This permitted "Mudhen" locomotives of the 450-464 series to be used over the whole line, along with new 470-series "Sports Model" engines then being built by the American Locomotive Company. The "Mudhens" and the new 470-series engines were all of the 2-8-2 "Mikado" pattern and were of outside frame construction, offering quite a contrast to the earlier and much lighter inside-frame 2-8-0s.

Similar relaying of rail on the Santa Fe Branch began at that time, but was carried out sporadically and in a haphazard fashion, resulting in a mixture of 45, 52, 57, 65, and 70 pound rail installed in the late 1920s. Nevertheless, by 1934 the line had rail of sufficient weight to carry the relatively new 470-class engines. The two-stall engine house which protected Chili line engines at Antonito was torn down, and common practice from then until the line was abandoned in 1941 was to



Lobato trestle (above) is one of two major bridges on the entire Cumbres Pass line, and just 4 miles from Chama (below). Arrival of the train in Chama inevitably caused a brief flurry of activity; change of engine crew; round-house force to service the locomotive; a passenger, someone to meet the train, or just an idle trainwatcher drifted down from Kelly's Shamrock bar. (R. W. Richardson.)



run the *San Juan Express* double-headed down the San Luis Valley from Alamosa, the train then splitting at Antonito to go in different directions.

The depression years were to be the beginning of a long decline in railroad service in the San Juan country. All over the Rio Grande system branch lines were pared away and service cut back. But this was not essentially a product of the depression, although the crash of 1929 undoubtedly aggravated the situation. As early as 1915 the automobile began making substantial inroads on railroad passenger traffic across the nation, and the rapid development of motor stages — as busses were initially called — as well as trucking firms, all cut into railroad revenues.

One of the Rio Grande's first answers to truck competition was to begin hauling "less-than-carload" freight — "l.c.l." in railroad parlance — in extra baggage cars on the *San Juan Express* in 1925. Hauling such freight on a passenger schedule permitted the railroad to compete more effectively with truck lines. An answer to bus competition was the modernization of passenger equipment. In 1937 the railroad rebuilt some of the original open-platform coaches into closed vestibule coaches, with electric lights replacing the original coal-oil lamps and with more modern sanitary arrangements. A stainless-steel kitchen and a dinette section were added to the parlor cars, and for the first time in its history, passengers could eat on the train. They could even make advance arrangements for special menus, steak for instance, and the steward would then purchase the necessary items for the specified day's trip. The *San Juan* steward also served as an ice cream vendor to children on the Indian reservations and in the little settlements along the line; the parlor car carried ice cream and a stock of cones on board, a very popular service along the border. The steward normally delivered newspapers all along the route. He could also be persuaded to buy small items, such as thread, for families living in remote country served by the railroad; local residents would give him money and a shopping list one day, and he would return with the merchandise on the next.

The vestibuled equipment was used only on the *San Juan Express*, however, and open platform coaches, little changed from the 80's, still rolled to Silverton and Santa Fe.

But at the same time the railroad was taking such constructive measures as hauling l.c.l. freight in baggage cars to compete with trucking schedules on the dirt road over Wolf Creek Pass, and modernizing the passenger equipment to retain and attract business, the management was adopting other policies which worked toward the reduction of the railroad's revenues in the San Juan country.

These policies were referred to as the philosophy of "total transportation." If the railroad could not compete with trucks and busses, so some executives reasoned, then it would go into the trucking and bus business also, and compete with the opposition on its own terms. What management overlooked was the fact that the company was undercutting its own rail lines by so doing.

It was in the late 1920s that the railroad began buying into trucking lines, and in April, 1930, several such firms were consolidated as the Rio Grande Motorway, Inc. Increasingly the new company scheduled truck and bus traffic in direct competition with the rail lines; indeed, during the early 1940s, Motorways President T. L. James admitted that one of the justifications for railroad ownership of truck and bus lines was "to substitute highway service on branch lines operating at substantial losses..." Branch lines could not be torn up without Interstate Commerce Commission approval, but by operating competing highway service the railroad could sap revenues from parallel rail lines, thus showing increasing losses as justification for abandonment. Freight intended to go by rail ended up traveling by truck, and the revenue went to fatten the Motorways' annual reports while the railroad line starved. A stockman would order a specified number of narrow gauge cars to haul his sheep to market; on the appointed day an equivalent number of Motorways trucks would appear instead. The Durango Chamber of Commerce protested such practices as early as 1941, and said that it felt the D&RGW was following "a well-organized scheme to abandon all

narrow gauge railroad operations in southwestern Colorado."

The negative attitude of the Denver & Rio Grande Western toward narrow gauge passenger service in later years was often obvious. Some agents, particularly those in Denver, would even deny the existence of any such train as the *San Juan Express*, and would sell tickets on Motorways busses instead. Nor was the practice restricted to Denver. In 1941 one passenger had to argue with the Alamosa agent for a rail ticket to Durango. The agent insisted on selling him a Motorways bus ticket that he didn't want; finally the exasperated customer had to threaten to come around behind the counter and make out his own rail ticket, before the agent would do it for him.

But the railroad was not alone in undermining the *Express*; equally disastrous for the passenger train from Alamosa to Durango was a 1938 action by the railroad labor unions. The brotherhoods at that time challenged the practice of handling l.c.l. freight in baggage cars, demanding extra pay for the switching involved. In 1939 the Railroad Labor Board awarded the train crews *ninety thousand dollars* in back claims from the railroad, and prohibited further l.c.l. shipment on the passenger train unless the railroad paid the crews freight handling salaries *in addition* to their regular passenger wages. That killed the l.c.l. business and made it impossible for the railroad to compete with truckers in l.c.l. handling. It was a blow from which the *San Juan Express* never financially recovered. The railroad brotherhoods got their tribute, but in the long run they helped kill off the train and put many of their own members out of jobs, a scathing indictment of the shortsightedness of brotherhood leadership.

Meanwhile, the management had indeed drawn up plans for eventual abandonment of its narrow gauge lines. The ultimate goal of the railroad was to exist as a "bridge railroad," a railroad with no branches and no local traffic, hauling freight in carload lots from one end of the system to the other.

The first to go was the Pagosa Springs branch, abandoned and the track removed in 1936. Next was the "Chili Line" from Antonito to

Santa Fe. Trucking, adverse freight rates, and the disastrous decision prohibiting handling of l.c.l. freight in baggage cars had taken their toll, and the railroad was able to prove a substantial loss. Despite bitter opposition, including a United States Senate hearing, the branch was abandoned and the track torn up in 1941. (Other connecting railroads had already disappeared; the Silverton Railway was discontinued in the middle 1920s; the Rio Grande & Southwestern was torn up in 1928 and 1929; the Silverton, Gladstone & Northerly had long since been absorbed by the Silverton Northern and eventually scrapped.)

World War II was the occasion for the shipment of seven of the ten large 470-series passenger engines to Alaska for service on the strategic White Pass & Yukon Route, where Army crews and severe Alaskan weather managed to ruin in three brief years locomotives whose sisters were still gallantly serving the Colorado Rockies more than two decades later. On some occasions after that, the Rio Grande would find it necessary to assign 480 or 490-series freight engines to haul the *San Juan* passenger train, if more than one of the three 470s was in the shop.

Despite often precarious track, the passenger trains suffered few wrecks through the years. The last was the most spectacular. Bill Holt was at the throttle of the *San Juan Express* eastbound between the two tunnels near Toltec on the afternoon of February 11, 1948. It was a cold day and, with the cab curtains drawn, noisy aboard the engine. Suddenly the airbrakes set up on emergency; a trainman riding the engine climbed down and went back to see what the trouble was. A moment later he came running back to the engine and shouted, "We got no train!" A snowslide had come down the mountain near Phantom Curve right behind the engine, carrying two coaches 300 feet down the mountainside and knocking over the parlor car, without even touching the engine. Surprisingly, no one was killed, and only a handful injured.

The twilight of the *San Juan Express* was at hand by the late 1940's. At the same time, the first break in the narrow gauge circle appeared when on August 29, 1949, the railroad filed an application with the

I.C.C. to abandon the track from Mears Junction to Hooper in the San Luis Valley north of Alamosa.

The last act for the passenger train began on Wednesday, September 28, 1949, when the Denver & Rio Grande Western filed an application with the Colorado Public Utilities Commission for authority to discontinue the *San Juan*. A few weeks earlier the railroad had filed for discontinuance on Sundays only, but changed its mind and decided to attempt complete discontinuance, claiming a loss of \$80,000 in 1948.

But the railroad did not wait for hearings to begin before it stopped running the train. Due to a nationwide coal strike, the I.C.C. had granted the nation's railroads permission to curtail service where necessary to save coal. With this excuse, the D&RGW discontinued the *San Juan Express* on January 9, 1950. But the paradox was that the mines serving the narrow gauge, such as those at Monero, were non-union mines unaffected by the strike. Thus there was actually no shortage of coal in the San Juan country.

A week later hearings on the abandonment, and on the subsidiary question of the "coal strike" discontinuance, began in the La Plata County court room. It was brought out that the U. S. Post Office Department had offered the railroad an additional \$20,000 for handling mail on the *San Juan*, which would have cut the railroad's losses by a quarter. One Durango businessman described the railroad as "an arrogant . . . monopoly bent on self-destruction."

On February 6, the P.U.C. approved discontinuance due to the coal strike, however the question of final discontinuance was still undecided, and with the end of the strike, the D&RGW resumed running the *San Juan* on March 11. The State of New Mexico was holding similar hearings in Tierra Amarilla, and one of its members, disturbed at the apparent willingness of the Colorado commission to do the railroad's bidding, was bitterly outspoken in criticism of the Colorado P.U.C.

The situation remained in abeyance all summer and fall, but on November 30, 1950, the axe fell when the Colorado Public Utilities Commission authorized permanent discontinuance of the *San Juan Express*. Subsequent appeals failed to

alter the decision.

On January 31, 1951, at 11:20 p.m., narrow gauge engine 488, its pilot plow covered with snow, pulled eight Pullman-green cars into the Alamosa station, completing the last run over Cumbres. The train had left Durango that morning behind Engine 484, which served as the helper engine from Chama to Cumbres, with 488 as the road engine for the final miles to Alamosa. Blizzards in the Conejos Range and the coldest weather in several years had delayed trains in both directions; it ended as it began, in the winter cold.

The New Mexico Corporation Commission, however, had refused permission to discontinue in that state, requiring the D&RGW to operate a stub local remnant of the *San Juan* from Chama to Dulce and return each day. Engine 473 and combination baggage-passenger car 212 commonly made the brief run. However, in light of the Colorado commission's permission for discontinuance, the New Mexico commission could see no further purpose in fighting the railroad, and even the abbreviated *San Juan* ceased to run after May 22, 1951.

In later years, the railroad also applied to abandon the Silverton Mixed, but a 1958 law had placed authority in the hands of the Federal Interstate Commerce Commission, which would not accede to the railroad's wishes. Most important, the Silverton Branch had by that time attracted so much tourist traffic that the railroad had to admit it was making a profit. Permission was refused, and the Silverton Mixed Train today brings in increasing revenue each year.

In addition, each year there were one or more special excursions from Alamosa to Silverton, reminiscent of the old *San Juan Express*, so Cumbres was not entirely devoid of passenger service. These were usually run either in the spring, before summer service on the Silverton Branch commenced, or in the fall about the time the Silverton train was suspended for the winter. In 1951 the railroad had begun experimenting with a bright yellow paint scheme on the Silverton train, and within several years all the passenger cars were that color. Business Car B-2 was last to lose its Pullman green color, in 1963; it, too, appeared in

the bright yellow which the railroad called "Rio Grande Gold." The gaudy color had originally been used on Combine 212 for the filming of "Ticket to Tomahawk" in 1950, and was a far cry from the varnished Tuscan red color of the original passenger equipment in the San Juan country. Motion pictures also suggested the use of fake diamond-stacks on the relatively modern 470-series engines, about as effective a disguise as converting a Ford Mustang to a Model T by adding brass-rimmed headlights.

The early 1960's witnessed an increasing schedule of special excursions over Cumbres using the yellow Silverton Train equipment, including the old closed-vestibule cars from the latter-day *San Juan Express*. When in 1962 the Rio Grande began to promote the Silverton Train as a tourist attraction and a Denver newspaperman was brought in to head the project, he considered resuming operation of a train from Durango to Chama and perhaps eventually Alamosa, but nothing came of it.

Then on January 6, 1967, the *Silverton Standard* carried a headline announcing that the Rio Grande would run no more excursions over Cumbres, because the track had become unsafe for passen-

ger traffic. In the autumn of 1966, excursions had been so popular that they were run three weekends in a row, the last being the ESA trip to Cumbres on October 9, powered, ironically, by engine 484, which had hauled the last *San Juan Express* from Durango to Chama and had helped it to the summit at Cumbres. Now, it had hauled the last excursion special to the crest of the Conejos Range.

Declining freight traffic had led to economies in track maintenance, in turn leading to inevitable deterioration in the line's condition. Then too, there were rumors that the Denver & Rio Grande Western had already prepared exhibits to be filed with the Interstate Commerce Commission supporting an application to abandon the Alamosa-Durango-Farmington lines. Ironically, before the application could be filed, two proposals were made to expand passenger service over Cumbres.

In December 1966, even before discontinuance of special excursions was announced, the New Mexico State Parks and Recreation Commission announced that it was investigating the possibility of operating excursion trains from Chama over Cumbres, carrying tourists in summer and skiers in winter. Colorado's Director of Commerce and

Development said that he would be pleased to meet with the New Mexico officials in support of the plan.

On January 17, 1967, a few weeks after discontinuance of excursion specials was announced, a new corporation known as the Rio Grande & San Juan Railway Company filed application with the I.C.C. for permission to run excursion trains from Alamosa to Chama over Cumbres, using rebuilt cars from a narrow gauge Mexican railroad, painted in the old livery of Tuscan red and gold. But the RG&SJ proposed to use Denver & Rio Grande track, crews, and locomotives, and the D&RGW indicated no willingness to sign any such contract.

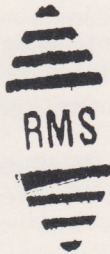
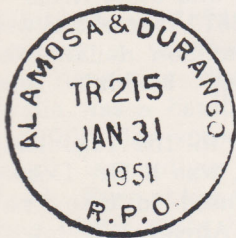
As the snows melt on Cumbres and release the narrow gauge rails from the grip of winter, the silent section house awaits the eighty-sixth year of coal smoke and cinders on the heights of the Conejos Range. Among the freights which cross the pass will there be an occasional string of red or yellow coaches — or are they but the ghosts of decades past? Whatever the future holds for that pass between the cloud-hung peaks, it seems likely that the Denver and Rio Grande Western has run its own last passenger train over Cumbres, and it will never be quite the same without them.

C. W. Hauck





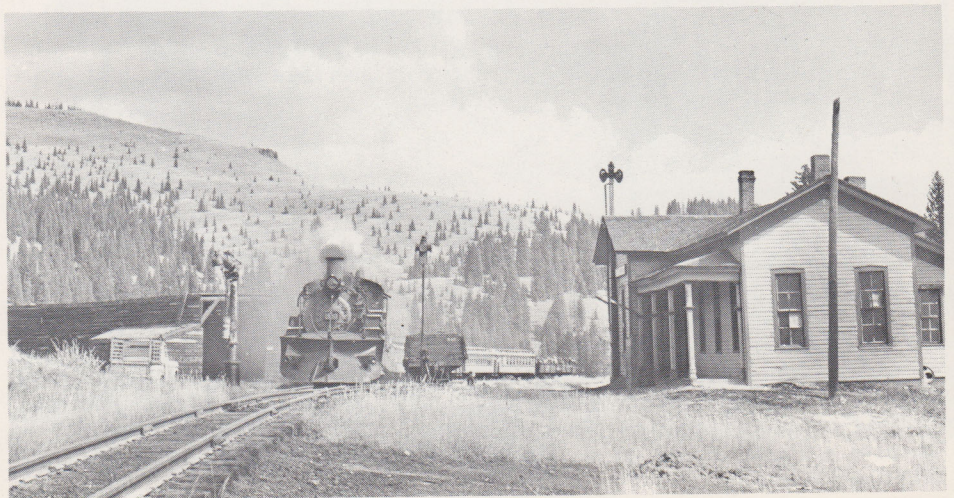
R. W. Richardson



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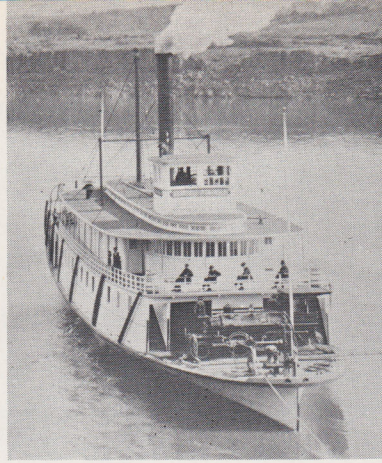
The last run of the San Juan (train 215) left Alamosa on January 31, 1951, behind the 488, with 9 cars in the consist to accommodate an overflow crowd. Appropriately, the weather was cold, icy and snowy. The trip marked the end of regular service over the tortuous route — illustrated by the early-day advertising map at right — after some seventy years. Thereafter an occasional excursion train was to find Cumbres more lonely and solitary than ever (below), until even they, too, ceased to run.

C. W. Hauck



Cornelius W. Hauck

Six Little Porters from Walla Walla



After the Civil War, settlement and homesteading of the Pacific Northwest began to gather momentum — and the great Columbia River valley was one of the popular objectives of the early pioneers.

By 1870 two major towns had grown up in the Columbia valley. Portland, some miles inland from the mouth of the Columbia, was already becoming the great mercantile center for a vast area. The other major town was Walla Walla, in eastern Washington Territory, some 30 miles east of the Columbia itself.

Walla Walla had been founded in a great, fertile valley along the Walla Walla River; a valley covering thousands of square miles of farmland that pioneers had found ideal for growing wheat. Not only was the soil and climate ideal, but wheat could be grown along the Walla Walla without irrigation.

Each summer and fall the wheat had to be shipped out to market, and this was quite a laborious process. The grain, in sacks, was wagon-freighted over primitive roads to the old river port of Wallula, once a fur-trading post, on the banks of the

Columbia 30 miles west of Walla Walla. Here it was loaded onto the decks of small river steamers for the trip downriver to Portland, where it was trans-shipped via coastal steamers to San Francisco and other markets.

This process was further complicated by the fact that the Columbia is interrupted in its flow to the sea by a series of rapids, or Cascades, that impede navigation. To circumvent these, short "portage" railroads were built in the early 1850s; and in the early 1860s these tramroads plus the riverboat lines were merged together as the Oregon Steam Navigation Co., and a powerful transportation monopoly built up to control traffic in the Columbia valley.

The farmers along the Walla Walla were quite unhappy over their transportation service, however. It was slow and uncertain, and there was a long wait 'til their grain reached market and could be sold. Just getting the grain to the boats was in itself a major, and costly, undertaking; the freighters asked as much as \$12 a ton for the Wallula-Walla Walla trip, which was as much as the OSN received for the entire run to Portland. And the wagon service was slow and un-

certain, presenting a major problem, since the wheat had to be moved out before low water on the Columbia halted navigation until the following season!

Logically, the idea of a railroad from Walla Walla to the Columbia soon came under discussion. A local group organized in 1868 to push the idea, and subsequently retained General James Tilton, a civil engineer, to make a thorough study of the proposition.

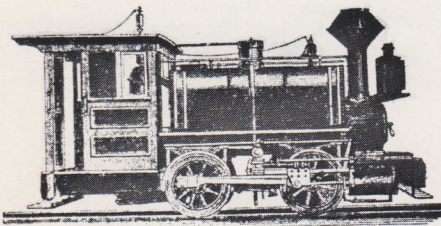
General Tilton submitted a detailed survey early in 1871, proposing a standard gauge railroad from Walla Walla to Wallula, the old fur trading post on the Columbia. The first 18 miles from Walla Walla was to be easy going over open farm country, but after crossing the Touchet River General Tilton's survey called for heavier grading, side-cutting and frequent trestles as the line negotiated the lower part of the Walla Walla valley.

Grading of the line was to cost \$166,988, track \$358,784 (using 45 lb. English rail), and the total cost — including two stations, two 26 ton locomotives, and other items — was to be \$673,367. It might as well have been six million dollars; the organizing group couldn't raise either.

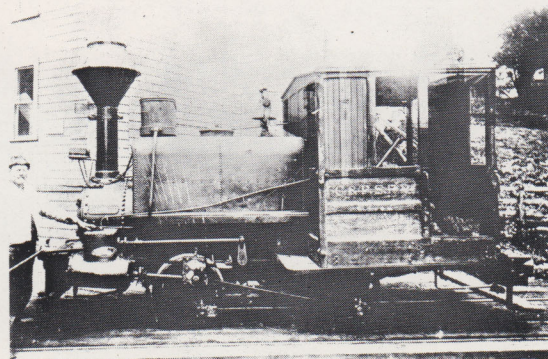
Prime mover in the organizing group, however, was a Dr. Dorsey Baker, who refused to take "no" for an answer. Already the town's leading banker, Dr. Baker was one of those energetic pioneers to whom progress was something to be worked for vigorously. If the Walla Wallans would neither buy stock nor vote bonds for a railroad, Baker would do it himself.

Not to the tune of $\frac{2}{3}$ of a million dollars, though. The idea of narrow gauge railroads, which could be built and equipped for a fraction of the cost of a standard gauge in many instances, was being promulgated, and Dr. Baker wisely decided that this was what the country needed. He was right, for he managed to build a railroad along General Tilton's route for less than half the projected cost, and it served adequately for a decade until it became the nucleus for the succeeding Oregon Railway & Navigation Co. (now a major part of the Union Pacific system).

Baker began his Walla Walla & Columbia River Railroad at Wallula



The artist's impression of the Walla Walla (above; Eastern Washington State Hist. Soc.) looks satisfyingly close to the actual appearance of the same locomotive when it was photographed many years later as Columbia & Puget Sound no. 7 (Museum Collection).



in 1872, on a basis of absolute economy wherever possible. To operate the line, he purchased two small saddle-tank locomotives from Porter-Bell in Pittsburgh. The first, delivered early in the spring, was named the *Walla Walla*; the second (WW&CR engines were not numbered until the OR&N took over) arrived in late summer and was appropriately named the *Wallula*. Both were identical small, simple 0-4-0 saddle tank affairs of typical Porter pattern, weighing but 7½ tons apiece. The other equipment of the line consisted of a small fleet of home-made flat and box cars, utilizing wheels and hardware shipped out from the east. One such box-car-like affair was equipped with bench seats for use as a coach; and this was the only kind of passenger accommodation provided by the line until about 1878.

T-rails were beyond the road's budget initially also, so construction of the line was begun using strap iron rails. The road progressed towards Walla Walla rather slowly, stopping first at Touchet, some 17 miles from Wallula, and reaching Whitman in 1874. The required transfer to teams and coaches for the remaining distance to Walla Walla was a handicap, as was the painfully slow speed dictated by the small locomotives and strap-iron track. Even at low speeds, the strap-iron had a nasty habit of working loose and curling up at the ends, and if the resulting "snake head" punched up through the car floor it created quite a problem. Finally, however, sufficient funds were raised to buy enough rails not only to replace the by now badly worn strap-iron, but to finish the line as well. This latter event occurred on October 23, 1875, and was marked by an all-day excursion over the line using flat cars equipped with seats — and at which expansive speeches promised great things for the railroad, including new locomotives and real coaches.

The new equipment was slow in coming. Finally, the next summer, a new, larger locomotive arrived from Pittsburgh: christened the *Columbia* (eventually no. 3), it was another Porter, a 10-ton 2-4-0 (plus tender) of typical Porter pattern. With the new engine and better track, service improved; soon the regular mixed train — which ran daily



The Columbia was a typical, natty little Porter 2-4-0, and served the Columbia Valley for which it was named for some forty years. Shown coming downriver from the WW&CR to The Dalles in 1883, for transfer to the Cascades RR., the Columbia can be seen opposite on the deck of the steamer Hassalo. On this page, it was captured in snapshots while running on the Cascades line in later years; apparently the big oil headlight had been disposed of in favor of daytime running, and the platform became a handy observation seat. (Left and bottom, George Abdill; top, University of Oregon.)



during navigation season only — was making the trip (some 32 miles) in a scheduled 3 hours. Rates had come down, too; the wagon freighters had cut their rate per ton to \$6, so the good Doctor cut the railroad rate first to \$5, and later to \$4. Still the farmers were not satisfied; one reason was that, as railroad and wagon freighters delivered more grain to the river port at Wallula, the small river steamers operated on the route by the OSN monopoly proved inadequate to promptly move the grain downriver to Portland — much to the irritation of the short-tempered farmers.

Yet the railroad seems to have operated fairly successfully, after finally being completed, hauling quite a bit of grain in season. Baker was a rugged individualist, and operated his railroad accordingly. Grain was handled at the railroad's convenience, and such items as pianos, billiard tables, glass and marble (so-called "special freights") were specifically handled at the "owners' risk of damage, breakage, or leakage" — quite a utopian arrangement for claim agents!

Parsimony notwithstanding, the railroad seems also to have been operated safely enough; Ed. S. Babb is recorded to have been the first man to lose a finger on the line, in the spring of 1877, five years after operations began, and the first serious accident was not recorded until August 31st of that year. That evening the "down train" broke through one of the highest trestles on the line, variously reported as 35 or 40 feet high, located near Summit (a deep cut and high point on the line) about 12 miles east of Wallula. The engine got over the trestle safely, but the next 8 cars fell through. Four men went down with the train, but none were hurt. Cause of the wreck was recorded as a loose wheel; the wheels were affixed to the axles by keys, and one of the keys had come loose.

Baker was alert to the eventual competitive threats to his railroad, primarily from standard gauge transcontinental lines from the east, and in a defensive move entered into negotiations with the OSN during the winter of 1877-78. Captain J. C. Ainsworth and the other OSN Directors were long-time acquaintances of Baker's, and he managed to persuade them to purchase 6 7 of

his ownership of the railroad — reputedly for a million dollars. Now, railroad and river lines were under common control.

At the same time, the long-awaited new equipment began to arrive. Genuine coaches from Billmeyer & Small at York, Pa., replaced "the hearse", the box-car-with-benches that had provided passenger service. And three new locomotives arrived in rapid succession, early in 1878 — the *Blue Mountain*, the *Mountain Queen*, and the *J. W. Ladd*.

All three were Porter products — making a total of six little Porter machines on the line by spring of 1878. The *Mountain Queen* was a duplicate of the ten-ton *Columbia* 2-4-0, but the *Blue Mountain* was a larger, 14 ton, 0-6-0. The *Ladd* was the mystery of the lot — a much larger (20½ ton) affair than any of the others, and of standard 2-6-0 mogul design, it was actually purchased by William S. Ladd, a Portland banker and one of the OSN Directors. Technicalities of ownership notwithstanding, it does seem to have been purchased for operation on the WW&CR, and the reasons for this arrangement do not seem to have been preserved.

The little Porters might have continued to wheel freight and passengers from Walla Walla for many years, save for the sudden appearance of the railroad empire-builder, Henry Villard. For in 1879 he bought out the OSN and WW&CR both, lock, stock and barrel, and reorganized them as the Oregon Railway & Navigation Co. By that July ambitious plans for extension were put into effect — a big new steamer was ordered, and extension of the WW&CR was begun. The railroad was pushed in two directions — from the Walla Walla end, southeastward into Oregon, as far as Blue Mountain Station; and west from Wallula Junction (about a mile from old Wallula) along the *Columbia*.

By 1880 the narrow gauge tracks of the WW&CR, now the Oregon Railway & Navigation Co., had crept west through Umatilla to end of track beyond Coyote, more than 43 miles, when Villard's plans suddenly changed. Faced with the threat of renewed life in the Northern Pacific plans for westward extension, Villard's OR&N joined forces with the

NP, and in so doing doomed any thoughts of operating a narrow gauge line along the *Columbia* (and, down to meet the *Utah & Northern*, as had been rumored). Instead, a new standard gauge line was begun immediately from downriver, building east to meet the existing narrow gauge. The narrow gauge attrition began the next spring; on April 17, a Sunday, the line from Umatilla as far as Wallula Junction was converted; on May 25, 1881, the first standard gauge engine entered Walla Walla. The old WW&CR was about gone — as the newspaper phrased it, the "relics" of the "bob-tail" were soon to disappear — and only the *Blue Mountain* branch remained to operate narrow gauge, pending building of a standard gauge line on new alignment in 1882-83.

All narrow gauge was not to disappear from Walla Walla, however, as Dr. Baker was to be heard from again. During 1880-81 he had purchased land a few miles out of town on which he planned to erect a flour mill, and he built a flume down from nearby mountains. To serve this new undertaking, the Mill Creek Flume and Manufacturing Company, he built a narrow gauge short line railroad out from Walla Walla, that was to eventually reach the towns of Dixie and Tracy. The little railroad principally hauled wheat and cordwood (the chief fuel in use then), and the little *Mountain Queen*, made surplus by standard gauging, was put on the job. The Mill Creek line did not yet connect with the OR&N, and one day early in August the little *Queen* was taken apart and carted over roads to the new line, where it was reassembled.

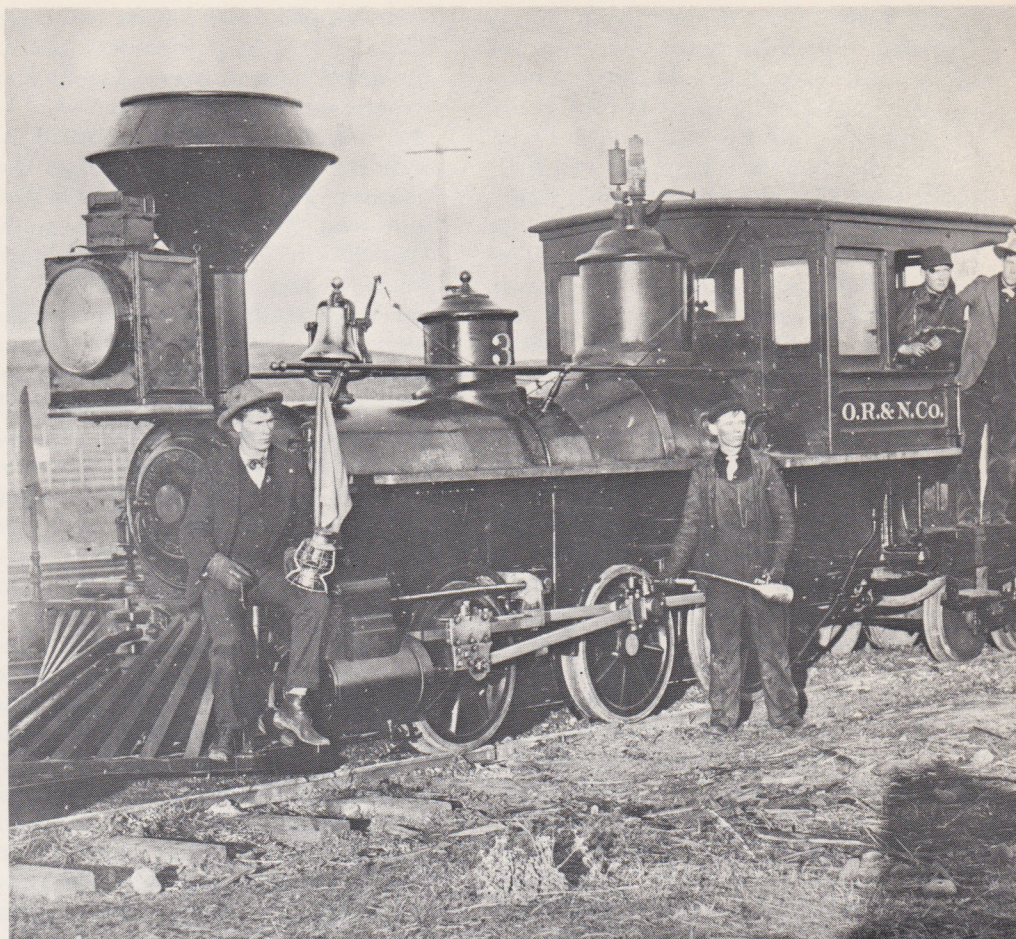
The *Mountain Queen* was not the first WW&CR locomotive to leave, however. The *Walla Walla*, *Wallula* and *J. W. Ladd* (now OR&N 1, 2 and 6) departed from Wallula in June and July, 1881, leaving behind (in addition to the *Queen*, then OR&N 5) the *Columbia* (OR&N 3) and *Blue Mountain* (OR&N 4) to operate the *Blue Mountain* branch.

Eventual disposition of the 1, 2 and 6 seems fairly well established. One of the 0-4-0s, presumably the *Walla Walla*, became no. 7, the *Hyak*, of the *Columbia & Puget Sound*, operating around the Seattle docks until displaced by standard gauging in 1897. No record of a sale

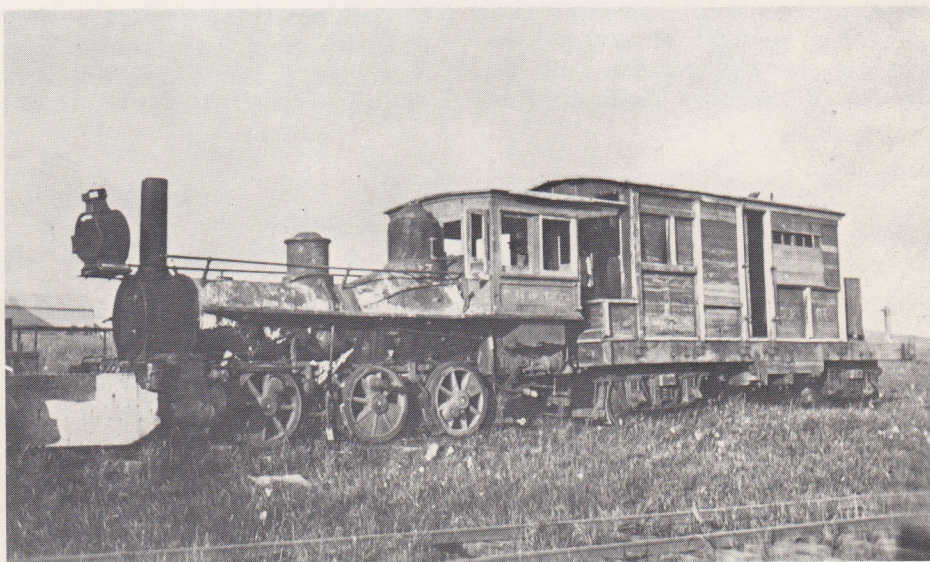
by the succeeding Pacific Coast RR. exists, but the little engine may well have seen further service switching a lumber mill or in stationary service. The other 0-4-0 — the *Wallula* — was rumored sold to "J. W. Sprague for building the Northern Pacific Railroad", but there is no evidence to support this idea. Sprague was an NP official, and at this period was acting as contractor for building a large portion of the new NP transcontinental line in Idaho and eastern Washington, but there is nothing to indicate he used a narrow gauge engine in this work. It is known, however, that the *Wallula* soon turned up as switch engine on the Olympia & Chehalis Valley, a narrow gauge line between Olympia and Tenino; and further, Captain Sprague became President of the O&CV after his NP construction work. Thus, as Sprague was well known in Walla Walla as an NP official, it is easy to see how such a report on the *Wallula* might have gained circulation. Another report had the *Wallula* inadvertently run off the end of the dock at Wallula, where it was said to have been covered over by the shifting sands of the Columbia, and where it still lies. This seems entirely unsubstantiated — although it is always possible that one of the little 0-4-0s might have been briefly dunked in the river and then quickly extricated and dried out.

Circumstantially no. 6, the *Ladd*, is believed to have become Columbia & Puget Sound 6, serving on that line until it too was displaced by standard gauging. It was then resold to the Puget Sound Mill & Timber Co. of Mike Earles, at Port Orchard, where it presumably spent a number of years in lumber service.

However, the whereabouts of these three locomotives between 1881 (they were shipped from Wallula to The Dalles, where OR&N shops were located, in June) and 1883 is the subject of some contention. One explanation has the *Walla Walla* and *Ladd* going directly to the C&PS (as nos. 7 *Hyak* and 6, *Rainier*, in that order) in June and July, 1881, and the *Wallula* to the O&CV (as no. 2, replacing an unknown earlier engine) by December of that year. However, reconstruction of an interesting series of newspaper reports of the period, recording in a casual way transfers



The handsomely posed photo above, featuring the one-time WW&CR Blue Mountain, was taken about 1903 at Walla Walla, when the little 0-6-0 was running on the Mill Creek line, now a part of the Oregon Railway & Navigation Co. Thus it was the last WW&CR engine to operate out of its original home terminal. In 1905 the line was sold to the Northern Pacific, and the Porter was soon after sold to the Seward Peninsula RR. at Nome, Alaska. It was still there in 1932, stripped and derelict, with its old "O.R.&N.Co. — 3" lettering clearly showing through. The odd affair behind it is not an enclosed tender, but the remains of an old box-cab Climax geared locomotive which had been converted to a motorized unit. (Top, J. E. Broyles from George Abdill; bottom, Museum Collection from K. Gus Smarey.)



of locomotives to and from hometown railroads, suggests a more involved chronology. It seems apparent, first, that two ex-WW&CR engines did go directly to the C&PS — but that they were the two little 0-4-0s; that the *Ladd* (then a handsome mogul of first rate quality for any narrow gauge road) went instead into service on the Oregonian, a narrow gauge operating in the valley south of Portland, which Villard had taken over on a lease arrangement. The line subsequently went into decline, and eventually — in 1884 — the lease was cancelled. In September, 1883, the C&PS obtained a locomotive from the OR&N's Oregonian "division", and the *Ladd* is the only known candidate for this honor. All other Oregonian locomotives are satisfactorily accounted for; and the roster of the Columbia & Puget Sound has been sufficiently developed to establish that the 1883 purchase from the OR&N could only have involved no. 6. Finally, between 1881 and 1883 the C&PS moved to dispose of some of their lightest power, apparently then selling one of the two small 0-4-0s to Sprague's O&CV.

The subsequent histories of the *Columbia*, the *Blue Mountain*, and the *Mountain Queen* can be traced more positively. The former two, it has been noted, were used on the Blue Mountain extension until 1882-83. In 1883 the OR&N, primarily to hold a franchise and freeze out any potential competition, built a small portage railroad on the north bank of the Cascades, below The Dalles. As traffic was certainly not expected to be heavy, the utilization of the former WW&CR narrow gauge equipment must have seemed logical — and a quantity of material, including the two engines just displaced off the Blue Mountain line,

were shipped down for the new operation. The photo included here of the steamer *Hassalo* is believed to be the *Columbia* (now numbered 3) arriving at The Dalles during this transfer. Although the *Blue Mountain* was to be transferred about 1894-96 to the Mill Creek line (*below*), the *Columbia* stayed on the Cascades line for the life of the operation. In later years, after a severe flood in 1894 had wiped out part of the line, a reduced stub operation served the salmon packing plant of the Warren Packing Co. at Moffatts Landing. Finally, between 1906 and 1910, the line fell into total disuse and the little locomotive, a veteran of over 30 years service, was broken up for scrap.

As noted above, after the 1894 flood the *Blue Mountain* was sent to the Mill Creek line to join the *Mountain Queen*. This road was taken over by the OR&N in 1887, although independent operation was continued, and both the Cascades and Mill Creek were taken over, along with the rest of the OR&N, by the Union Pacific in 1891. Under UP control the little Porters acquired the biggest numbers of their careers — only to lose them again for low numbers under the 1894 OR&N renumbering.

The *Mountain Queen* was sold to the Ilwaco Ry. & Navigation Co. in February, 1900, but the light little locomotive proved unequal to the task on the Ilwaco and was quickly resold to one A. J. McCabe. Presumably she was put to some light duty before being broken up. It then remained for the little *Blue Mountain*, now OR&N no. 3, to outlast all her sister engines — by a wide margin. The sturdy Porter continued to serve the Mill Creek line until 1905, when it was sold to

the Northern Pacific. The NP, after purchasing the line in January, converted it to standard gauge in July, and the 3-spot dropped from sight.

But not for long; for in 1906 the engine appeared in alien surroundings many miles from her Columbia valley home: in Nome, Alaska, on the Seward Peninsula Railroad, originally the Wild Goose Railroad, an unbelievable streak of rust near the Arctic Circle that was operated principally with Climax geared engines. How many years the Porter actually operated over the road is difficult to say. The line went bankrupt in 1911, when regular steam train service ceased; a local entrepreneur attempted to operate it after a fashion until the Alaskan government acquired it as a "highway" in 1921; haphazard operation continued for years thereafter with privately owned motor cars, although the resumption of steam service was rumored during World War II. The Porter was stripped and derelict at Nome by 1932, however; it was still there nearly a decade later, and some of its bones may be there yet, if a qualified ferroequinologist were to look for them. It was the last of the six little Walla Walla Porters — a sturdy little band of near-miniature sized locomotives that made an outsized contribution towards bringing rail transportation to the pioneer Pacific Northwest.

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the Roster

data:

NAME	BLDR NO.	DATE	CYLS	TYPE	OR&N NO.	OR&N 1889	UP 1890	OR&N 1894
Walla Walla	114	3/72	8x16	0-4-OT	1 -	—	—	—
Wallula	124	8/72	8x16	0-4-OT	2 -	—	—	—
Columbia	246	7/76	9x16	2-4-0	3 - NG3	1	284	1
Blue Mountain	283	1/78	10x16	0-6-0	4 - NG4	2	291	3
Mountain Queen	289	2/78	9x16	2-4-0	5 - NG5	3	286	2
J. W. Ladd	292	2/78	11x16	2-6-0	6 -			